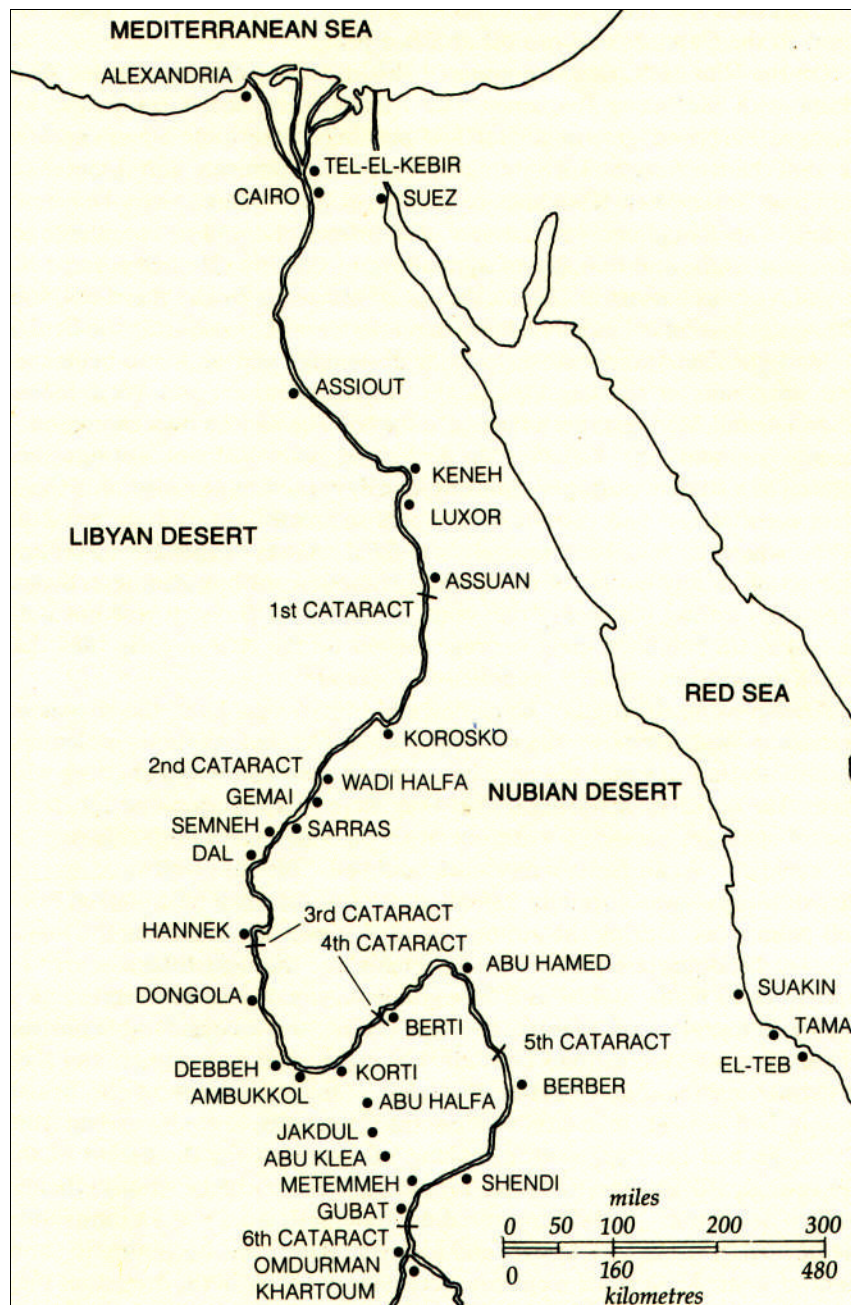


# NILE RIVER



Source: *Canadians on the Nile 1882-1898*, by Roy MacLaren, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1978

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN 1884 - 1885

By the end of 1883 the Mahdi had gained control of much of the Sudan from the weak and disorganized Egyptian military. Khartoum was harassed and the Egyptian government, under British pressure, decided to abandon the rest of Sudan. In January 1884 Charles George "Chinese" Gordon, Sudan's former governor, was sent by Britain to decide on the best means of evacuation. On February 18<sup>th</sup> Gordon arrived in Khartoum as the Egyptian governor-general. The Mahdi's hold around Khartoum tightened and soon Gordon was cut off from communication with Cairo. By August British public opinion forced Prime Minister Gladstone and parliament to authorize a relief expedition commanded by General Sir Garnet Wolesley. Upon arriving in Cairo he immediately organized the relief forces. Over the next few months British military units were sent up the Nile to Korti, eventually advancing across the desert to Abu Klea (January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1885) and on to Abu Kru (January 19<sup>th</sup>) on the Nile. Time was running out, so they dashed towards Khartoum on January 24<sup>th</sup> in two steamboats. On the 28<sup>th</sup> they came within sight of Khartoum but realizing the city had fallen, the boats reversed course to the camp of the Desert Column. Indeed, Khartoum fell on January 26<sup>th</sup> and Gordon was killed. At the end of March the British began withdrawing from Korti and all were out of the Sudan by the end of July.

Mail was handled by the Egyptian civil post offices along the line of march. From Cairo to Assiut the mail was carried by railway; Assiut to Assouan by steamer; Assouan to Philae by rail; Philae to Halfa by steamer; Halfa to Sarras by rail; Sarras to Abu Fatmeh and the south by camel. Regular post offices were opened at Dongola and Korti. Local posts were organized by the military along the Line of Communications with the means of transport almost entirely by camel. The post riders were either natives or Egyptian soldiers.

Covers of interest include: • the earliest of eight known covers with the straight-line Assouan star and crescent c.d.s., • a cover from George, Duke of Cambridge and Commander-in-Chief of the British Army to the Commander of the British Army of Occupation in Cairo commenting on the Gordon situation, • an incoming cover to and an outgoing postcard from members of the Canadian Voyageurs, • one of the three known covers postmarked Tani.

**LUXOR, EGYPT to IOWA, UNITED STATES**

**19 FE 84**

Twenty paras post card written at Luxor on 19 February 1884, the day after Gordon arrived at Khartoum on his ill-fated venture. It is postmarked **ASSIOUT ARRIVEE 21 FE 84, ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 27 FE 84** and **DES MOINES, IOWA REC'D MAR 19 3 AM**.



After much general tourist banter, the message ends with: "We hear lots of talk about el Mahdi. It is believed by some if the English do not act promptly he will march into Lower Egypt however things there are very quiet & the natives do not believe in him



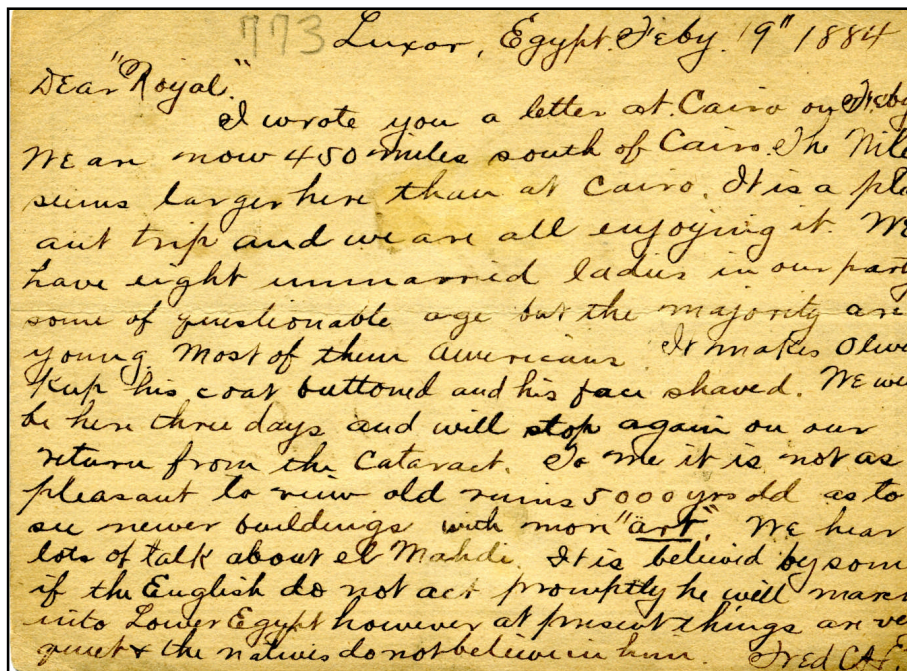
POST CARD FROM FRED CAF

Luxor, Egypt Feby 19<sup>th</sup> 1884

Dear "Royal" –

I wrote you a letter from Cairo on Feby 11. We are now 450 miles south of Cairo. The Nile seems larger here than at Cairo. It is a pleasant trip and we are all enjoying it. We have eight unmarried ladies in our party some of questionable age but the majority are young. Most of them Americans. It makes Oliver keep his coat buttoned and his face shaved. We will be here three days and will stop again on our return from the cataract. To me it is not as pleasant to view old ruins 5000 yrs old as to see newer buildings with mon "art." We hear lots of talk about el Mahdi. It is believed by some if the English do not act promptly he will march into Lower Egypt however things there are very quiet & the natives do not believe in him.

FredCaf



1173 Luxor, Egypt Feby. 19<sup>th</sup> 1884  
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seems larger here than at Cairo. It is a ple-  
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if the English do not act promptly he will march  
into Lower Egypt however at present things are ve-  
ry quiet & the natives do not believe in him. Fred Caf.

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### One Piastre Officer's Letter

CAIRO to ABERGELE, NORTH WALES

19 SP 84

Cover from Lieutenant Arthur Edmund Sandbach, Royal Engineers, to his mother. Cancelled **CAIRE DEPART 19 SE 84**, it bears the diamond-shaped cachet **M TPO E** and is backstamped **ABERGELE A SE 28 84**. The cover contained two letters.



The first letter was written on the transport ship S. S. Rewa off the island of Pantellaria west of Malta, Thursday 11 September. It says in part:

*There is sure to be a brush or two with the Mahdi's men and when once Wolseley is at Khartoum all Europe will look to see England's plans & if only Gladstone only has the courage to do it. Khartoum and all the country north of it should remain Egyptian. A feeble un-English retirement like that from Candahar merely renders useless all previous work, & until the Mahdi has been smashed & his movement crushed, Khartoum must be held by the English. This may mean that the troops will have to remain in Khartoum through the summer & if necessary let them do so.*

The second letter, written 14 September on board ship between Malta and Alexandria, says:

*Simmons<sup>1</sup> says he is quite sure that Ld Wolesley's expedition will not relieve Gordon at Khartoum: they are too late and Gordon has not provisions to last till December. If he is relieved at all he will relieve himself, though he will never desert the 8,000 women & children under his charge in Khartoum. At the same time he says there is a political significance in sending out Ld. Wolesley as it shows the Government means to do something in Egypt & not yield to French influences. It is very interesting to see what happens.*

LETTER FROM ARTHUR EDMUND SANDBACH TO HIS MOTHER  
11 SEPTEMBER 1884

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Lintorn Arabin Simmons, Royal Engineers, Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Malta.



S. S. Rewd.

off Island of Pantellaria  
W. of Malta.

Thursday Sept 18. 54.

My dear Mother.

You will have written  
no doubt, to Malta, & a letter  
from me in anticipation may be  
at least acceptable.

I am anxious to hear what are the Gilberts  
plans: have they given up Freywell:-  
& what is to become of the house in  
Queen's Gate Guss. Hafodurus will be  
more their home now, than any other  
place. & you will no doubt be a merry  
Xmas party, though that is rather looking ahead.  
What sport is Sam having in Scotland?  
Martin of course could not get leave again  
to go up to Fairlie with you.

I suppose you <sup>four</sup> are there now: & the girls  
are, I hope, enjoying fine weather for  
boating & fishing.

Fairlie, is a place I hope to see some day. -

LETTER FROM ARTHUR EDMUND SANDBACH TO HIS MOTHER

S. S. Rewa  
Off Island of Pantellaria W. of Malta  
THURSDAY Sept 11. 84

My dear Mother –

You will have written no doubt, to Malta, & a letter from me in anticipation may be at least acceptable.

I am anxious to hear what are the Gilbert's plans: have they given up greywell & what is to become of the house in Queen's Gate? Hafodnuos will be more their home now than any other place & you will no doubt be a merry Xmas party though that is rather looking ahead. What sport is Sara having in Scotland? Martin of course could not get leave again to go up to Fairlie with you. I suppose you four are there now & the girls are, I hope, enjoying fine weather for boating & fishing. Fairlie is a place I hope to see some day and then when Papa is there as he must have stories to tell of early days.

Aunt Fan's letter forwarded from Hafod. Just reached the ship before sailing. Free Lance is, I hope, in good health and spirits. Have Margy & Sophy ridden him much? & do they find that he has given up fouling.

The box of saddlery &c with the list should have arrived. The livery may be useful. Martin may perhaps like to have it but if not & if you do not use it, keep it for me when I come home again. I hope Byers may still be with me. Vic's mate is called Sparkie. He is an ugly dog but he is a dog that Byers picked up somewhere & I promised to keep him for Byers. Has Sam done any partridge shooting yet at home? All the bags and any hunt details will be interesting to me. Please thank Mrs. Wynue of Coedloch when next you see her, for her good wishes, which Margy sent. Thank also Margy & Sophy for their letters to Gravesend. I got one from Aunt Sara in her own handwriting. Aunt Kate I have heard little news of. Is she still at Malvern? Perhaps I shd have written to her.

Now for personal news for you.

Our ship is a palace compared with the Oxenholme. The Captain, by name Main, is a gentleman, & his officers are nice fellows. One young ship officer, the 4<sup>th</sup>, is a Bingham, and has a brother in the Rifle Bde. & another adjt of the 3d Hussars. In the Bay some people were a little troubled & kept to their cabins for 2 days, especially the fair sex, but since we passed the rock at Gib. They have had their piano on deck in the evening and with the Captain as Master of the Ceremonies, songs and dancing have been kept up from 8 till 10:30 pm, early hours but that is a good thing. We have a Major Scott of ours with a beautiful voice & a Mr. Taylor, Cooper's Hill man, going to India sings well too. Dancing on deck is all very well at present, however I have preferred reports on Egypt with a map to kicking one's heels about on a floor with absolutely no spring. It is a very pleasant voyage. I am glad to come out again. Recognizing the different points as we pass is interesting.

As regards the expedition we may get orders at Malta. Of course we all hope to go on from Cairo. The Railway Company (the 8<sup>th</sup> Co) expect to work & keep in repair the line of railway at Assouan round the first cataract and also from Wady Halfa to Sarras. You must follow these places on the map, and the telegraph section will keep the telegraphs in order south of Wady Halfa. From Cairo to Suit is only 12 hours by train, from Suit to Assouan 4 days by steamer, from Assouan to Wady Halfa 42 hours or about 2 days by steamer. From Wady Halfa to Sarras there is 30 miles of Railway, & from there the tough work in the boats, or perhaps by mules & camels (probably both) will begin. The dates names are Sarras Oct. 7, Dongola Nov. 7, then(?) we may cross the desert from Ambukol to Shendy (176 miles of sand) or go round by the Nile.

In any case it is an interesting country and an interesting expedition and I hope with all my heart I may get up well to the front. There is sure to be a brush or two with the Mahdi's men and when once Wolseley is at Khartoum all Europe will look to see England's plans & if only Gladstone only has the courage to do it. Khartoum and all the country north of it should remain Egyptian. A feeble un-English retirement like that from Candahar merely renders useless all previous work, & until the Mahdi has been smashed & his movement crushed, Khartoum must be held by the English. This may mean that the troops will have to remain in Khartoum through the summer & if necessary let them do so.

Is Sam coming out? I hope so & I wish Martin were there too. There is room enough for 3 of the name in the country! Best love to all- your aff son,

Arthur E. Sandbach

We reach Malta about 7 am tomorrow the 12<sup>th</sup> & Alexandria on Monday the 15<sup>th</sup>.



S. S. Reva.

between Malta and  
Alexandria.

Sunday. Sept 14. 1854.

---

My dear Mother.

It was a great disappointment  
not to get any letters at Malta  
as the mails from England have been  
stopped coming through Italy on account  
of the cholera.

They appear to have had quite a pause  
in Naples and Reggio.

However Col. Mackinnon, the Military Secretary  
promised to have them all sent on to  
Egypt.

We are lucky to have Sir Lionel Simons  
in Malta: himself an Engineer.

With Pemberton, (till lately with me in A. I. Regt.),  
as A.D.C., Sir Lionel will not allow any  
R.E. to pass Malta without seeing  
him at the palace:—

The ship arrived in the great Harbour  
at Valletta at 6. am.

LETTER FROM ARTHUR EDMUND SANDBACH TO HIS MOTHER

S. S. Rewa  
Between Malta and  
Alexandria

Sunday Sept 14. 1884

*My dear Mother –*

It was a great disappointment not to get any letters at Malta as the mails from England have been stopped coming through Italy on account of the cholera. They appear to have had quite a panic in Naples and Reggio. However, Col. Mackinson, the Military Secretary, promises to have them all sent on the Egypt.

We are lucky to have Sir Lintorn Simmons in Malta, himself an engineer with Pemberton (till lately with me in "A" Troop) as A. D. C. Sir Linton will not allow any R. E. to pass Malta without seeing him at the palace. The ship arrived in the Great Harbour at Valetta at 6 a.m. and the Aide de Camp came on board to invite us all (18) up to the palace to breakfast at 8:30. Lady Simmons and ---- were there too. They had all driven in starting at 6 from Verdara, the other house 8 miles out of Valetta to receive us.

Simmons says he is quite sure that Lord Wolesley's expedition will not relieve Gordon at Khartoum: they are too late and Gordon has no provisions to last till December.

If he is relieved at all he will relieve himself, though he will never desert the 8,000 women & children under his charge in Khartoum. At the same time he says there is a political significance in sending out Lord Wolesley as it shows the Government means to do something in Egypt & not yield to French influences. It is very interesting to see what happens.

We had a regular dance on board in the evening with the awnings and flags all round, & the Captain arranged it all very well. I really enjoyed it and afterwards there was supper and speeches.

Captain Main is very different from our Oxenholme friends. Last night he gave our Staff Sergeant a feast & the men some beer & biscuits & they commemorated the anniversary of Tel-el-Kebir, though only about two men (besides myself) on board were at the battle and any other anniversary would have been just as well.

I made the acquaintance on Friday night of the Taylors. Cecil Taylor is a brother of Richard Taylor who is at Malta. HE WAS AT Cooper's Hill & is in the Indian civil engineering service. He married his cousin, a sister of Brook Taylor, a widow, married first to a Dane, Count Blücher. She has a boy & a girl. The boy is at school at Elsinore & is to be a Dane, and the girl is on board going out to India – a very pretty child.

It is rather fun discovering some body who knows Prince's Sade & High Leg -- & heaps of people whom I know.

Please don't forget to order those papers regularly for me & send me any scraps of interests. Tomorrow we land at Alexandria about 11 o'clock and shall receive orders – whether to go to Cairo or not? — I hope my next letter may be from Cairo.

Give me all the home news. What of Sam now?

Your affec son  
Arthur E. Sandbach



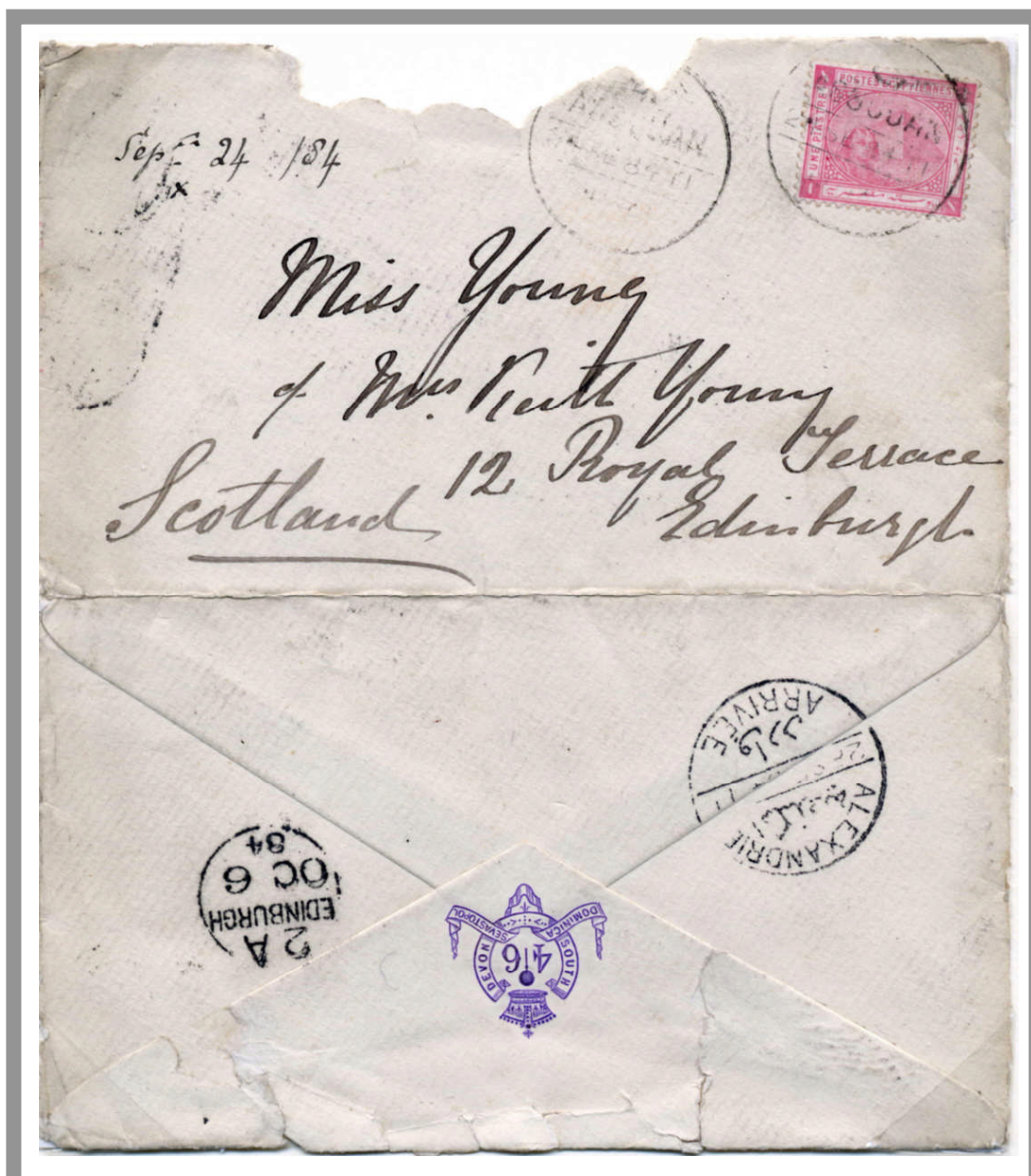
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### One Piastre Officer's Letter

ASSOUAN to EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

24 SP 84

While a faint example of the scarce straight-line ASSOUAN civil date stamp, this is the earliest date known. Seven others have been recorded between October 23 and November 16, 1884.<sup>2</sup>



British troops for the Gordon Relief Expedition began arriving in Egypt in August. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (46<sup>th</sup> South Devonshire) was positioned at Assouan in late September. In November they departed from Gemai for Korti in whaler boats. The trip up the Nile took from five to seven weeks, arriving between January 1 and January 10, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> See Smith, p. 599.

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

One Piastre Foreign Letter Rate

CAIRO to SEVENOAKS, KENT, ENGLAND

15 OC 84

The cover is backstamped **ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 15 OC 84** and **SEVENOAKS B OC 21 84**.

Lieutenant John Francis Burn-Murdoch (1859 – 1931) of the Royal Dragoons served with the Heavy Camel Regiment in 1884-1885. This letter from Sir Maurice Sheldon Amos, Judicial Advisor to the Egyptian government, is written to Mrs. Maria Burn-Murdoch, the lieutenant's mother. Having learned from Mrs. Burn-Murdoch that her son had arrived in Egypt, the Amos family went to the encampment at the Pyramids to find him just prior to his departure on the expedition.



Cairo 13 Oct/84

*We are all well. I am busy in various ways, Ld. Northbrook's mission having given us all something*

*I was very glad to get your kind letter & to hear Frank was already among us. We lost no time in hunting him out & had great pleasure in finding him encamped at the Pyramids. He had just received telegraphic orders to start up the river the same evening (Oct. 12). He was glad to see us & I think felt quite at home & asked us to look after some little things for him. I was pleased at his doing this without hesitation because instinctively how natural & strong was the claim he had on me for all the kindness could possibly show him. It is also a security that he will not pass through Cairo on his return without our seeing him. Frank looked extremely well in every way & I do not wonder at their choosing him for the highest & most responsible service.*

*We are all well. I am busy in various ways, Ld. Northbrook's mission having given us all something special to do. Well, love to all.*

*I am yrs. Affecy,*

**SHELDON AMOS**



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

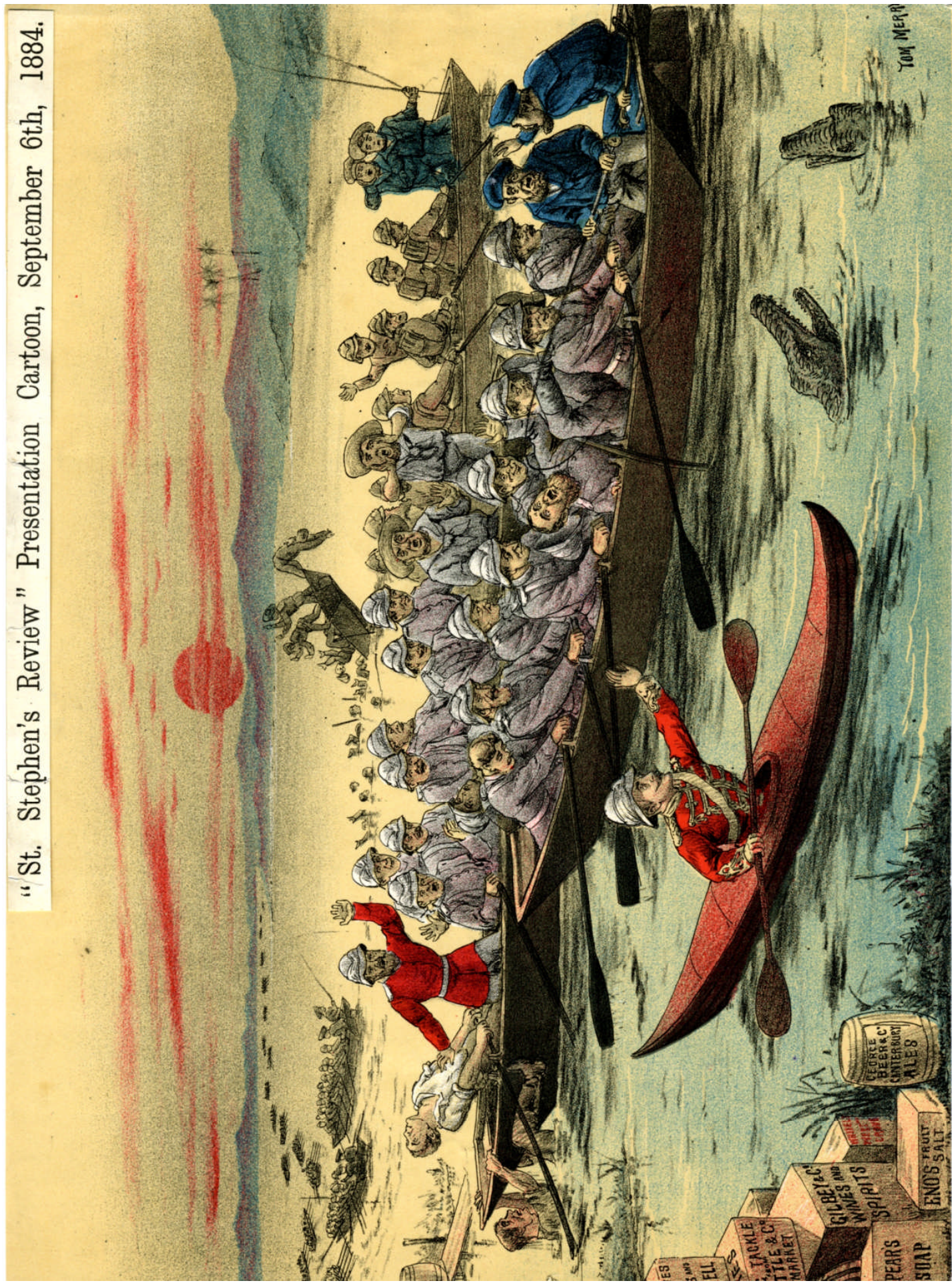
### The Canadian Contingent of Voyageurs



W W C VERNER del



"St. Stephen's Review" Presentation Cartoon, September 6th, 1884.





"St. Stephen's Review" Presentation Cartoon, September 27th, 1884.





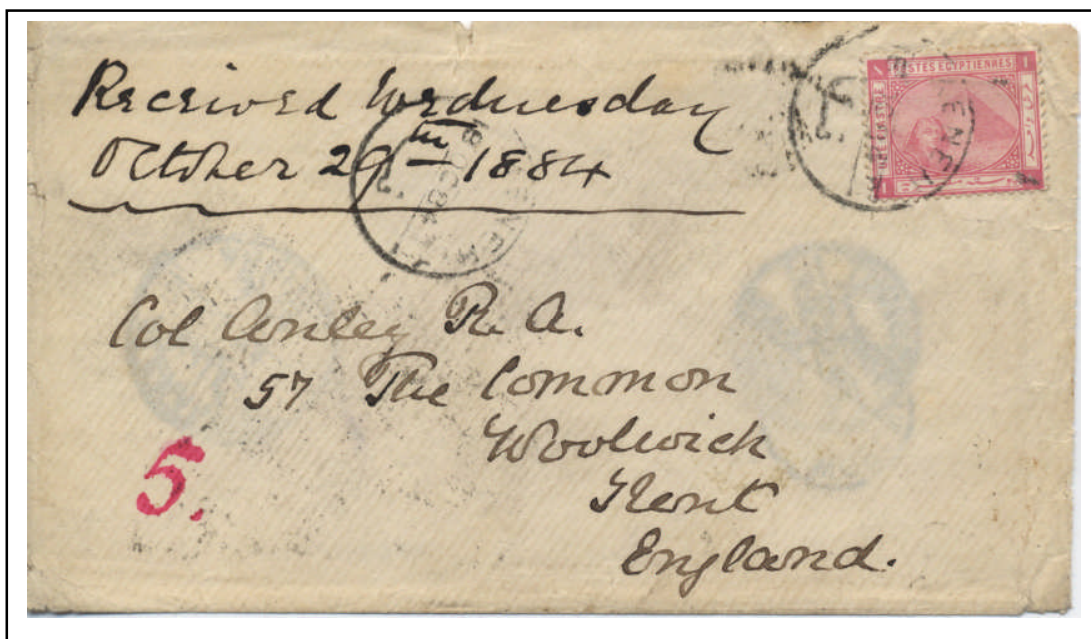
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

1 Piastre Officer's Letter

KENEH, to WOOLWICH, KENT ENGLAND

18 OC 84

This cover is backstamped **ASSIOUT ARRIVEE 19 OC 84**, **ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 21 OC 84** and **WOOLWICH N OC 23 84**.



Cover from Lieutenant F. Gore Anley to his father Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Augustus Anley of the Royal Regiment of Artillery. Lieutenant Anley, commissioned August 23, 1884, was with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Essex Regiment attached to the Nile River Column. This cover, the fifth received by Col. Anley, was written while traveling up the Nile to Gemai and Sarras with Lt. Col. F.C. Denison, commanding officer of the Canadian voyageur contingent.



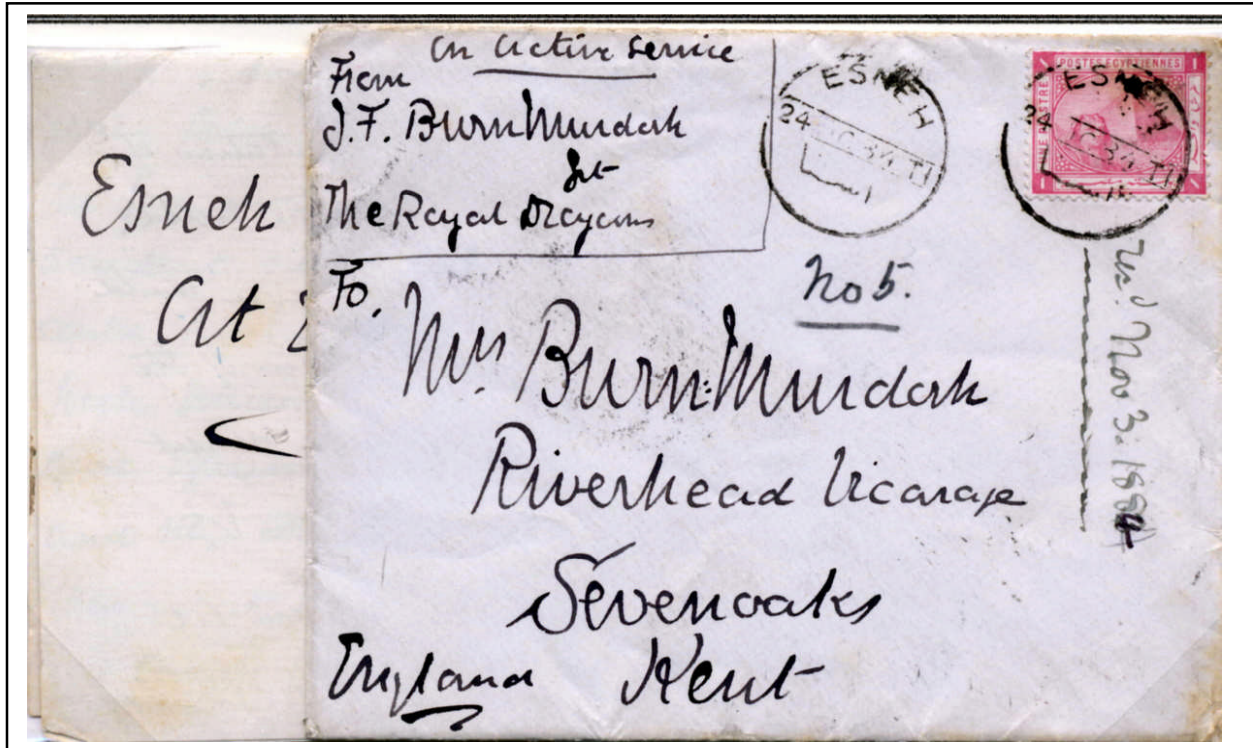
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### One Piastre Officer's Letter

ESNEH to SEVENOAKS, KENT, ENGLAND

24 OC 84

The cover is backstamped **ASIOUT ARRIVÉE 25 OC 84**, **ALEXANDRIE ARRIVÉE 28 OC 84**, and **SEVENOAKS B NO 3 84**.



John Francis Burn-Murdoch was commissioned a second lieutenant on 4 December 1878; and lieutenant on 2 February 1881. During his service with the Nile Expedition he took part in the action of Abu Klea; and commanded a detachment of the Camel Corps at El Gubat. He was awarded the Egyptian Medal with two clasps and the Khedive's Star.

The letter is in the form of a diary covering October 19 to 23. JFB-M asks his mother to keep his letters so that he wouldn't have to keep any other record.

Extracts from the letter:

**Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup>** "Reached Luxor at 3 o'clock. Strange to see about 700 British soldiers strolling about the temples. Some of the fellows went to the British Consul's house at Luxor and came back with a lot of curiosities. Rodney gave me part of the case of a mummy."

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup>** "My turn as orderly officer. Got to Esneh to coal. There was no coal so we have to wait. I think we have made the slowest voyage on record. The idea seems to be that the expedition will push on up the river as far as the boats will go. Here the infantry regiments will be left & we (the Camel Corps) will go on to Kartoum."

GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION – NILE RIVER COLUMN

This cover from *KENEH 25 OC 84* is backstamped *ASSIOUT ARRIVEE 26 OC 84*, *ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 28 OC 84* and *DUBLIN & BELFAST R.P.O. A NO 4 84*. It is interesting to note that mail to Ireland from the Egyptian campaigns is relatively scarce to come by.



This cover is cancelled with the straight-line Assouan star and crescent date stamp 30 OC 84. It is backstamped *ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 4 NO 84* and *BELFAST A NO 12 84*.



The covers are from Surgeon James Magill who served in the Nile Expedition in 1884-85 with the Guards Camel Regiment. He was present at the action of Abu Klea (17 January 1885) and wounded in the leg (mentioned in dispatches, Medal with two Clasps, and Khedive's Star).



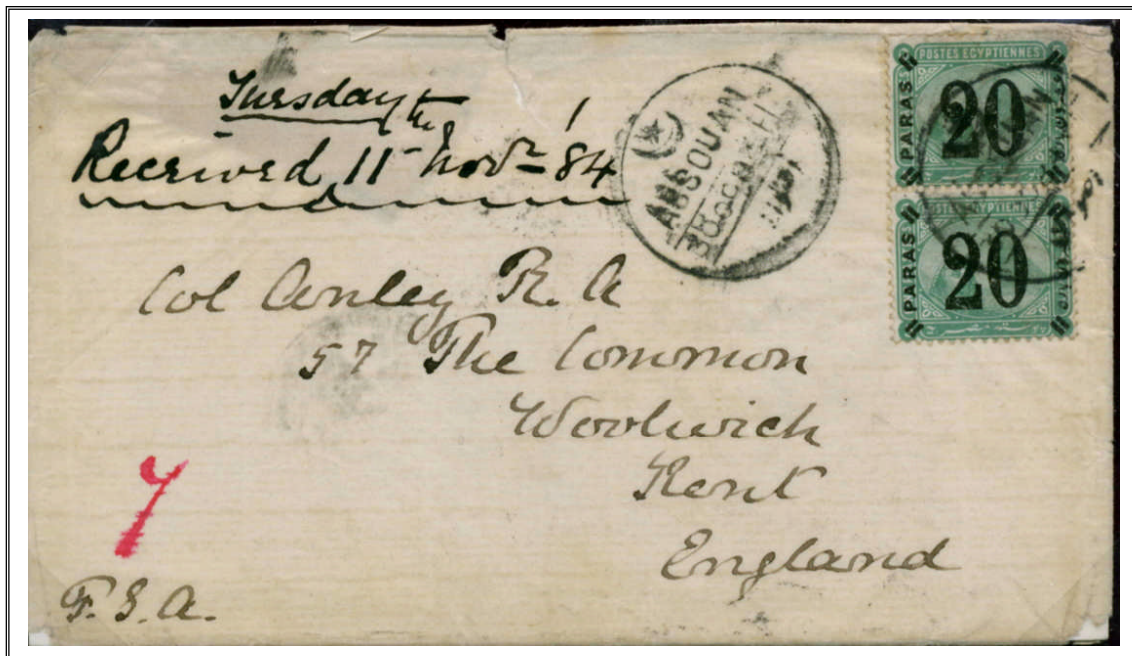
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### 1 Piastre Officer's Letter

ASSOUAN, EGYPT to ENGLAND

30 OC 84

A substantial quantity of the 1884 20 paras overprint on the 5 piastres stamp was sent to the military front. The stamps are cancelled with the straight-line Assouan star and crescent c.d.s. of 30 OC 84. This date stamp was in use for only the short period from late September to November 16, 1884 and only seven other covers have been reported. It is backstamped **ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 4 NO 84 TI** and **WOOLWICH A NO 11 84**.



Cover from Lieutenant F. Gore Anley to his father Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Augustus Anley of the Royal Regiment of Artillery.

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION

LONDON, ENGLAND to CAIRO

31 OC 84

Incoming cover from George, Duke of Cambridge<sup>3</sup>, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army (1856-1895) to Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Stephenson, Commander of the British Army of Occupation in Egypt. The cover is backstamped **CAIRE ARRIVÉE 6 NO 84 TIV.**



The enclosed letter says in part: "... I expect the murder of Colonel Stewart all but established. ... Not unless some desperate effort can be made Gordon will hardly be able to hold out till Wolseley reaches him. The endurance of the latter up the Nile seems very strong but this does not surprise me. ... I hope nothing further will be done to weaken our hold on Berber. ... I think the Berber Suakin road could be made use of..."

<sup>3</sup> He was the cousin of Queen Victoria and the grandson of King George III.



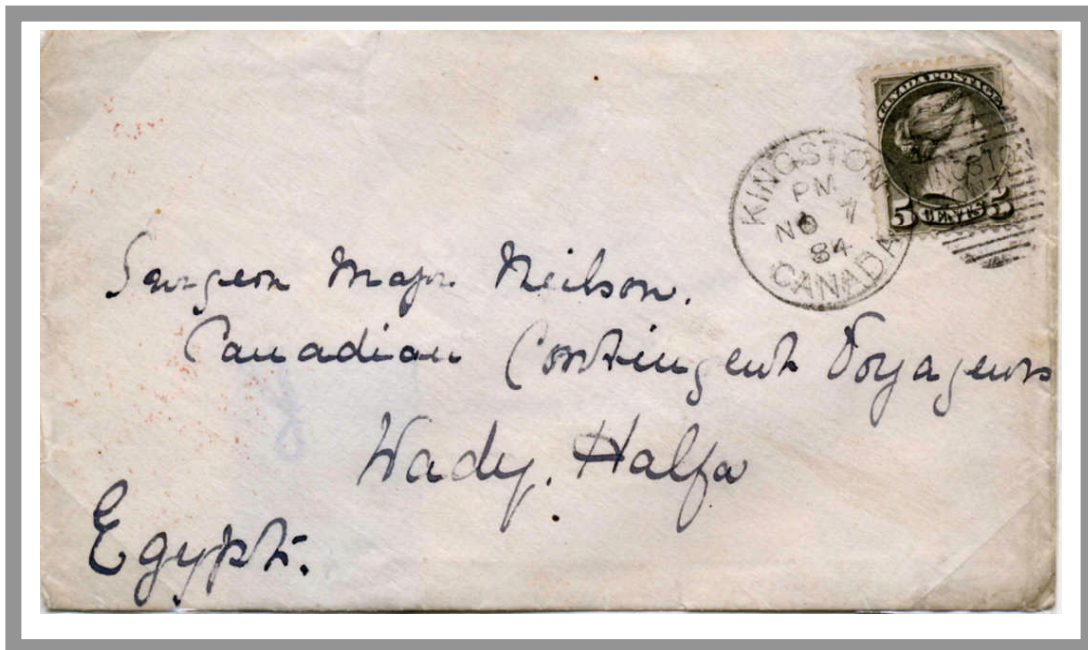
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### THE CANADIAN CONTINGENT OF VOYAGEURS

KINGSTON, CANADA to WADY HALFA

NO 7 84

An incoming letter from The Regiment of Canadian Artillery, Royal School of Artillery at Kingston, Ontario to Surgeon-Major John Louis Hubert Neilson. Franked with the 5 cent small Queen, it is cancelled with the Kingston beehive duplex, and backstamped with the red c.d.s. of **LONDON M P NO 18 84**. This is cover N<sup>o</sup> 12 of which eighteen covers are known from Canada to the Contingent, all of which are addressed to Surgeon-Major Neilson.<sup>4</sup>



The Canadian Contingent of Voyageurs left Montreal on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1884, and arrived in Alexandria on October 7<sup>th</sup>. They sailed up the Nile, arriving at Wadi Halfa on October 26<sup>th</sup> where they joined up with the Gordon Relief Expedition. Their job was to navigate whaler boats up the river over the cataracts. Most of the contingent started their return to Canada in January 1885. This was the first time that a Canadian military unit participated in an overseas Imperial expedition.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Stock, "The Canadian Contingent of Voyageurs Revisited," *The Camel Post*, No. 72, Autumn 2005.

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

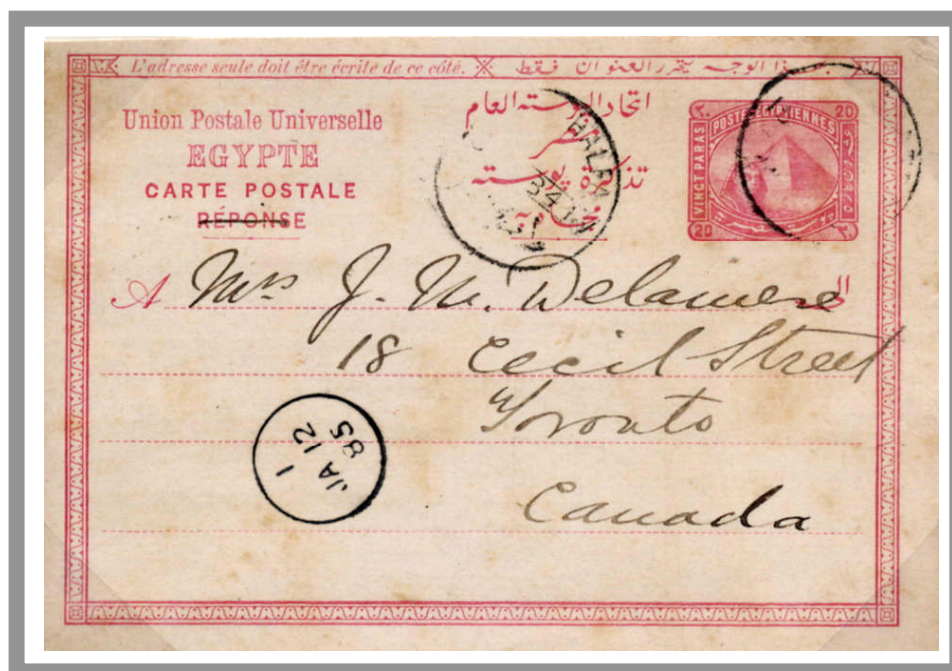
### THE CANADIAN CONTINGENT OF VOYAGEURS

20 Paras Post Card Rate

DAL via WADI-HALFA to TORONTO

12 DEC 84

This is the latest of the four known outgoing 20 paras Egyptian postcards from the Canadian Contingent.<sup>5</sup> Written at Dal, some 100 miles upstream from Wadi-Halfa, it is postmarked with the **WADI-HALFA** c.d.s. (date is unclear), backstamped with the red **LONDON NG DEC 29** transit marking, and bears the Toronto carrier marking on the front of **1 JA 12 85**.



The reverse of the postcard reads:

*Nile Expedition  
Dall 12<sup>th</sup> Dec/84  
Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.  
Fred. C. Denison*

Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Charles Denison (1846-1896) was the commanding officer of the Canadian Contingent.

<sup>5</sup> See Richard Stock, op. cit. There is also recorded an unstamped envelope from Wadi-Halfa to Winnipeg.



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### Incoming Registered Letter

ABERGELE, WALES to CAIRO

DE 4 84

Two pence registered postal stationery envelope with an additional five pence for the double-weight postage from Great Britain to Egypt. It is backstamped **CAIRE.A.RECCOMMANDES ARRIVEE 11 DE 84**. Registered covers in any of the Egyptian/Sudan campaigns, whether incoming or outgoing, are exceedingly rare; this is the only one from this campaign known to the exhibitor



Arthur Sandbach got to Cairo but stayed there until the spring of 1885 when he joined the forces in Suakin.

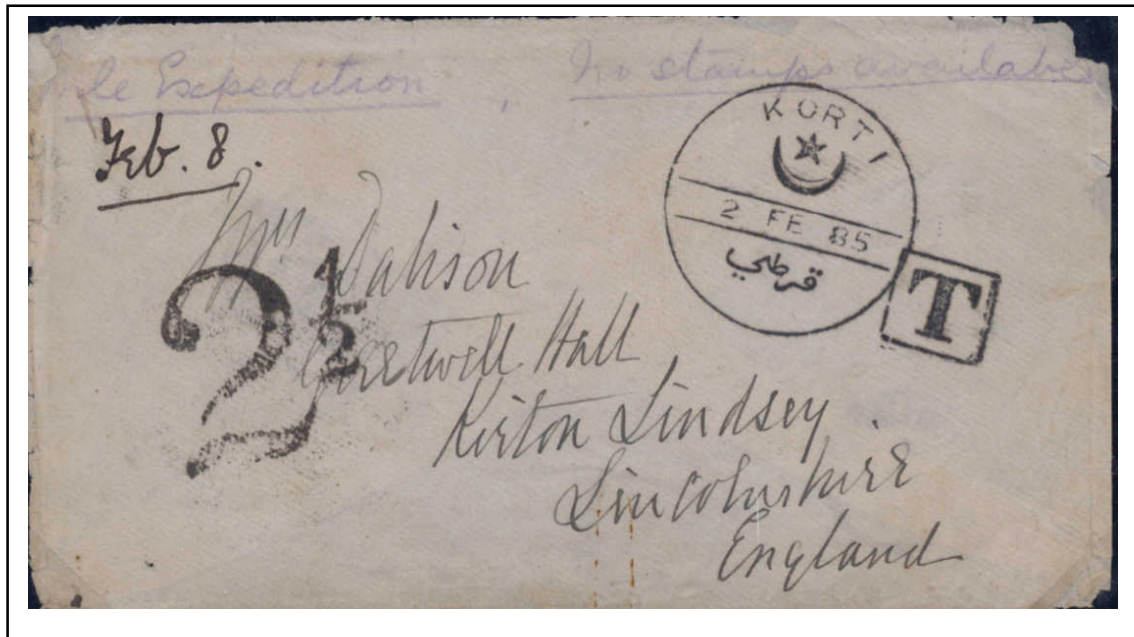
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

Unpaid Officer's Letter — Endorsed: Nile Expedition No Stamps Available

KORTI, SUDAN to ENGLAND

2 FE 85

Stampless cover with the large star and crescent date stamp of Korti, a town on the Nile River. The British reached Korti around December 15, 1884, and departed for summer quarters towards the end of March 1885. The date range of the fifteen recorded examples is 26 January 1885 to 23 March 1885.<sup>6</sup> The cover has the boxed T handstamp indicating postage was owing and the 2½-charge mark applied in England where the postage due was collected. Penalties were not collected, only the basic postage rate. The cover is backstamped **KIRTON LINDSEY FE 24 85.**



The cover is dated two days before the news of the death of Major-General Charles Gordon and the fall of Khartoum on January 26<sup>th</sup> reached General Wolesley at Korti. The cover is from Lieutenant John Pelham Dalison to his mother. He was commissioned a Lieutenant on December 19, 1883 in The Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment). He served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion during the Nile Expedition of 1884-1885, receiving the Egyptian Medal with Clasp, and the Khedive's Star.

<sup>6</sup> See H. L. Bowyer, "Large Star and Crescent Postmarks Associated With the 1884-85 Nile Expedition," *Camel Post*, Number 32, Autumn 1985, pages 26 – 34.



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### One Piastre Officer's Letter

KORTI, SUDAN to ENGLAND

23 FE 85

While endorsed Nile Expedition No Stamps Available the sender, Lieutenant John Pelham Dalison of the First Battalion, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, apparently found a pair of the 20 paras overprint on the five piastres to pay the foreign letter rate. The stamps are cancelled with the large star and crescent datestamp of Korti. The cover is backstamped **CHELSEA S.O. A MR 17 85 S.W.**



The enclosed letter, written February 17<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup>, contains many of the common gripes and comments probably found in much of the mail of soldiers throughout history. In this particular case Lieutenant Dalison mentions an inspection and parade held for General Wolesley and the Mudir of Dongola which he called a farce. Further on he comments:

*I see Prince Hassan is to be appointed Gov' Gen' of the Soudan, good heavens can't they let the place alone. What do they want here? Hassan is a good man though & almost an Englishman, took honors at Oxford, & is a keen sportsman & so has our interests at heart, but he only has Egyptian troops. At least I hope for our sake they won't leave any English to garrison the towns & and yet I think it is more than likely they will leave us at Berber."*



GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

Letter from Lieutenant John Pelham Dalison, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, to his Mother

next autumn & I don't think anything we can do to the north will be bad enough. I hope they are going on sharp with the Berber Brakin railway. I expect there will be some sharp fighting over that bone. I hope when the autumn begins they would send Braken's brigade up the river again; I think I had better stop writing now as it may be bad for my head. Best love to you all

Your very devoted son  
John

Monday 23 I am much better this morning & I shall convalesce tomorrow or the day after. We get all sorts of delicacies in hospital except cocoa milk toast & everything one can want. I have just read the last mail with your letters of the 25 & 29 Jan. & I am afraid your news is not very correct, I wonder who spreads those reports if it is an Englishman he ought to be ashamed of himself. I wonder what you all think of the news now, & poor Stewart dead too & the painful part of it is that it is all for nothing. Do you know I think I'd rather not hear your war news, as it is heartrending to read your cheerful accounts & know the truth & as far as any fear of its getting into the enemy's hands go, I think I expect that I should want to be to your letters. It would be rather a good thing for us as it would be so trusted thing. Your father, send your news & what I want to know is your

my dearest sister. Ever so many thanks for your last letters & the spare sheets of paper, also the little boxes very much indeed for the photo. I like to see it very much but I don't know what to do with it now, I think he looks very thin & it is a great pity he has changed off his mustache, & I think it is just as well for a father to cut it off to look clerical as it is for him to grow what God gave him thick & woolly, whether it is better to cut off your mustache or to look as if you did care for your personal appearance when you perhaps must do, or to grow your hair & try to look nice, the whole theory of shaving for persons is based on appearance, so I say it is 5 to one & 1/2 day to do it, so Regar my son this is to you & begin & grow your mustache again, we haven't got many of them in the family (except mine which is being forced by the sun) & so can't afford to lose any. When we used to sleep in our bedroom together at Hampton we little thought how far apart we should be in 1885. The sight of the clean boots & nice clothes & tidy hair is heartrending & I think we ever see them again. I shall go every next time I put on a pair of clean boots & there are dozens of little things like that which will bring you to our hearts when we get to England. I think we did not know what it was to be without before. I found out what our inspection was for yesterday viz. to have the machine of Dongola, only why it wasn't done when the 18th & 35th & our whole Regt. were here we can't make out, as it was every man in camp was turned out, even down to the officers of the Regt who have never been known to march past before & got their shirts out in consequence. The column was headed by the naval "Brigade" 1880 & 44 men, you have seen such a ludicrous sight in your life, then followed 1 1/2 sqns of 19th Light on foot - one knows why, then some motley crew of commissariat & hospital corps & ordnance stores & c. & c. & then came the only thing which could have saved him



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

Letter from Lieutenant John Pelham Dalison, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, to his Mother

Korti, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1885

My dearest Mother

Ever so many thanks for your last letters & the spare sheets of paper, a;so thank Roger very much indeed for the photo. I like to see it very much. But don't know what to do with it now. I think he looks very thin & it is a great pity he has shaved off his moustache, & I think it is just as wrong for a parson to cut it off to look clerical as it is for him to grow what God gave him & look worldly, whether it is better to cut off your moustache to look as if you didn't care for your personal appearance when you perhaps invariably, or to grow your hair & try to look nice. The whole theory of shaving for parsons is based on appearances so I say it is 6 to one & ½ doz. to the other. So Roger my son this is to you & begin & grow your moustache again, we haven't got many of ?? in the family (except mine which is being forced by the sand) & so can't afford to loose any.

When we used to play in our bedroom together at Hamptons we little thought how far apart we should be in 1885. The sight of the clean booths & nice clothes & tidy hair is heart rending, shall we ever see them again? I shall go crazy the next time I put on a pair of clean boots & there are dozens of little things like that which will bring joy to our hearts when we get to civilized countr, things we didn't know what it was to be without before. I found out what our inspection was for yesterday viz., to awe the Mudir of Dongola, only why it wasn't done when the 18th & 25 & our whole Regt. were here we can't make out, , as it was every man in camp was turned out, even down to the officers of the Pay Dept. who have never been known to march past before & got their shirts out in consequence. The column was headed by the Naval Brigade: 1 offr & 4 men, you never saw such a ludicrous sight in your life, Then followed 1 troop CC & 1 ½ squadrons of 19<sup>th</sup> H on foot, no one knows why, then some motley crew of Commissariate & hospital corps & ordnance store & etc & then came the only thing which could have awed him

[page 2]

& that was five companies of the Essex & 4 companies of ours, followed by something else, I could not see what quite, but there were about 100 men in all the uniforms of the country, about every 10<sup>th</sup> man wearing a kilt. The whole thing was a farce & the dust was the crowning point of all, it defies description, I can only say that we were choked & spat mud, & blew mud down on our noses, nasty but true nevertheless. Wolseley's horse began white & ended brown. There was a high wind which made it worse & we always manage to march with the wind so the dust was all over the place. I never saw Wolseley from the first time I raised my foot till we halted in front of him when slowly as the clouds of dust were blown away he & the Mudir were discovered. I think they must have had nearly as bad a time as we did. I am glad to hear that Gladstone & the government had at last decided to build the Suakin-Berber railroad although I fear it will be the means of keeping us in the country all through the summer or the best part of it. Why on earth this wasn't done a year is what beats me. If it had Berber would not have fallen nor would Khartoum, Gordon would not have been killed & so many lives would not have been lost in this beastly Nile & the cost would haave been very much diminished because all the boating expenses would have been spared. What I should like to know now is whether we are to wait here till it is built or if they will let the reinforcements try the desert route. I see Prince Hassan is to be appointed Govn Genl of the Soudan. Good heavens, can't they let the place alone. What do they want here? Hassan is a good man though and almost an Englishman, took honors at Oxford, & is a keen sportsman & so has our

[page 3]

interests at heart, but he only has Egyptian troops. At least I hope for our own sakes they won't leave any English to garrison the towns & yet I think it is more likely they will leave us at Berber.

Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup>. Dear Mother I have been stupid enough to go and get a chill & am now in hospital with a slight fever. You needn't be the least curious for I am not very bad as you may judge or else I couldn't write. The weather is so treacherous here very hot all day & suddenly getting cold about sundown. This is rather a bad place to get well, the fever always being highest in the afternoon & almost disappearing at night. I sleep very fairly & my bed is very comfortable after about 3½ months on the hard ground. I am perfectly disgusted at the state of affairs here, more than one ever anticipated, fancy retiring but one is bound to before such overwhelming numbers. We are going to take up our summer quarters about 10 miles lower down the river & they will build mud huts for the troops & entrench them all round I expect. I am glad I escaped that desert march as it was all for nothing. Brackenbury's brigade has been recalled, I wonder how they will come back. They will have to march I expect, not one stroke of good luck has this expedition had & 2 gen<sup>ls</sup> & so many officers & men. I hope to goodness they will make sure of success

[page 4]

next autumn & I don't think anything we can do to the Mahdi will be bad enough. I hope they are going on sharp with the Berber Suakin railway. I expect there will be some sharp fighting over that bone. I hope when the autumn begins they would send Bracken's brigade up the river again. I think I had better stop writing now as it may be bad for my head.

Best love to you all  
Your very devoted ~~brother~~ son  
Jack

Monday 23 I am much better this morning & I shall convalesce tomorrow or the day after. We get all sorts of delicacies in hospital – beef tea, cocoa milk, toast & everything one can want. I have just read the last mail with your letters of the 25 & 29 Jan & I am afraid that your news is not very correct. I wonder who spreads those reports. If it is an Englishman he ought to be ashamed of himself. I wonder what you all think of the news now, & poor Stewart dead too & the painful part of it is that it is all for nothing.

Do you know I think I'd rather not hear your war news, as it is heart rendering to read your cheerful accounts & know the truth & as far as any fears to its getting into the enemy hands go, I think (I except that I don't want to loose your letters) it would be a rather good thing for us as it would be so misleading. ..., send your news & what I want to know is your opinion.



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION

One Piastre Foreign Letter Rate

CAIRO to SEVENOAKS, KENT, ENGLAND

24 FE 85

The cover is backstamped with the **SEVENOAKS C MR 2 85** squared circle postmark.



The letter dated February 22, 1885, from Sir Maurice Sheldon Amos to the mother of JFB-M expresses concern over the critical stage of the campaign following the Battle of Abu Klea on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1885. In that battle the Dervishes broke the Square where JFB-M and the Royal Dragoons were located. Early that morning Major Gough, JFB-M's friend and Commander of the Mounted Infantry, was wounded. He concludes:

*I myself am in favour of occupying strongly and indefinitely all the country between Suakin, Khartoum, the Red Sea & the Nile. I hope the English public will be brought round to this.*

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### Letter from Sir Maurice Sheldon Amos to the mother of John Francis Burn-Murdoch

Cairo Feb. 22/85

My dear Mrs. Burn Murdoch,

*I have been time & again on the point of writing to you to express our deep sympathy with you both through this terrible time. It is something more than sympathy, because I feel a personal anxiety on Frank's behalf myself. The more so as this sort of warfare seems to tell most on the best & the bravest. At Abou Klea, Frank must have been at the most critical point of the square. I fear it must be a very long time before we can hope for any relief or rest from our extreme concern. It is one of those cases, in which we can only believe and hope and pray, & I am sure you will both do all of these.*

*I am very much distressed by Frank having been inconvenienced through his watch not having reached him. I am at a loss to understand how it happened. I gave it into the hands of a brother officer, a Mr. Cameron, (whom I knew & had reason to trust in) proceeding along with his regiment to the place where Frank then was, and I gave him Frank's letter to me containing his formal address so as to insure identification. I can only imagine that Frank's regiment had moved on suddenly before Mr. Cameron got up & that the latter did not like to pass the watch through too many hands. Frank mentioned the post to me, but I am assured at the post office that it is against the rules to register watches, & I do not think it would have been safe.*

*Anyway I am extremely sorry Frank has had no watch. I have been much interested by all the details of his movements you have been able to supply me with. I hope the last events will lead to operations being conducted on a more adequate scale, when not so much will be left to the personal courage of individual officers. I myself am in favour of occupying strongly and indefinitely all the country between Suakin, Khartoum, the Red Sea & the Nile.*

*I hope the English public will be brought round to this.*

*With love to you, I am affectionately yours,*

SHELDON AMOS



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION

Top: 1 piastre officer's letter from Lieutenant Arthur Edmund Sandbach, Corps of Royal Engineers, to his mother, Elizabeth Charlotte Williams Sandbach from Cairo to North Wales. . The cover bears the **CAIRE DEPART 24 FE 85** c.d.s. and is backstamped **ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 24 FE 85** and **ABERGELE MR 3 85**.



Bottom: Incoming 2 ½ d. letter postmarked with the **HEREFORD MR 6 85** beehive duplex to A. E. Sandbatch [sic] at the 11<sup>th</sup> Company Royal Engineers in Cairo

Lt. Sandbach embarked on September 3, 1884 to join the 11<sup>th</sup> Field Company at Cairo and become part of the Gordon Relief Expedition going up the Nile. However, only part of the Company was sent and Sandbach, as the junior subaltern, remained in Cairo. He assisted in the formation of the Mounted Royal Engineers Section, which joined the Mounted Infantry at Suakin in April 1885. Many years later Sandbach was also known as "Sandbags."

# GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION

One Piastre Foreign Letter Rate

CAIRO to NORTH WALES

6 MR 85

The cover is backstamped with the **ABERGELE MR 16 85** postmark.



In the copy of the letter that was enclosed Lieutenant Sandbach laments about his upcoming assignment.

*"Oh! The misery! doomed again to bitter disappointment. My last letter was full of joy and hope – a Victoria Cross, chance of distinction, a name and noble fame, loomed in the distance. By Monday night's orders I was named with 25 of my men for service as pioneers with the Mounted Infantry*



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

1 Piastre Officer's Letter

ABU HALFA, to BELFAST, IRELAND

25 FE 85

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 1885, the Guards Camel regiment left Abu Klea for Jakdul and on the 21<sup>st</sup> went on to Abu Halfa. The regiment camped there until March 4<sup>th</sup> when it departed for Korti. This cover was likely posted at Abu Hamed and it failed to get a date stamp at Korti. Therefore, when it arrived in Cairo without a postmark the stamp was cancelled with a retta obliterator. It is backstamped **CAIRE ARRIVÉE 9 MR 85**.



James Magill was commissioned Surgeon, 3 May 1876; Surgeon Major, 22 December 1885; Brigade Surgeon, 3 May 1896, and Surgeon Colonel, 22 December 1904. Hart's Army List for 1906 shows him stationed in Egypt. After the Nile Expedition he also served in the South African campaign, taking part in operations in Orange Free State, February to May 1900; in the Transvaal, May to June 1900, July to October 1900, and November 1900; and Cape Colony in 1900, being present at the actions of Belmont, Enslin, Modder River, Magersfontein, Poplar Grove, Dreifontein, Vet River, Zand River, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Diamond Hill, Belfast, and Koomati Poort; and operations in Cape Colony, November 1900 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 1902 (mentioned in dispatches, CB, Medal with six Clasps, King's Medal with two Clasps).

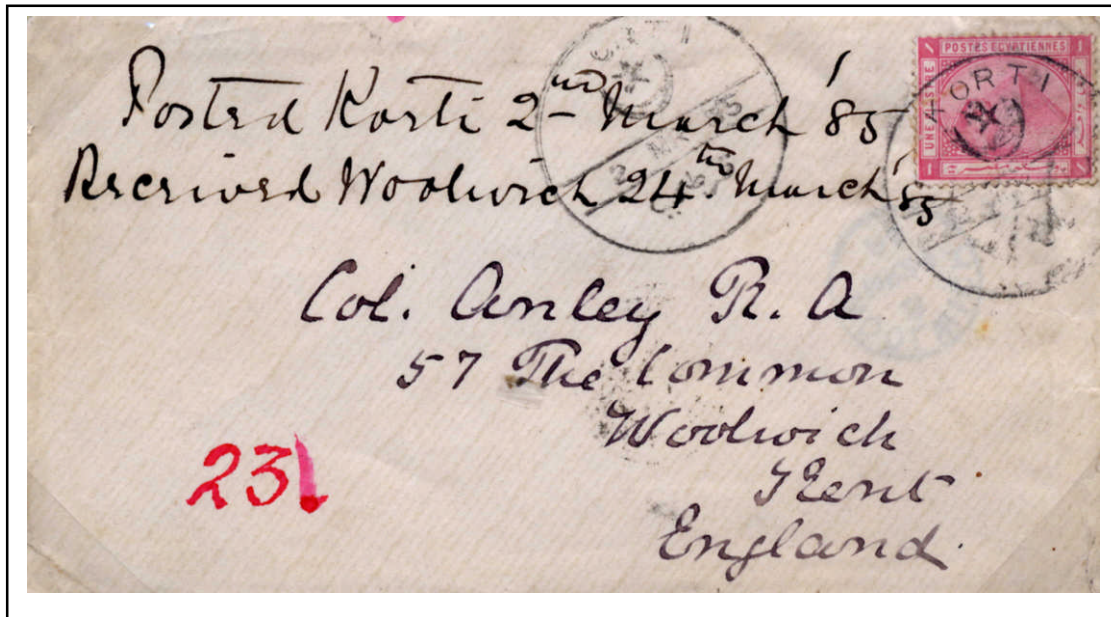
GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

One Piastre Officer's Letter

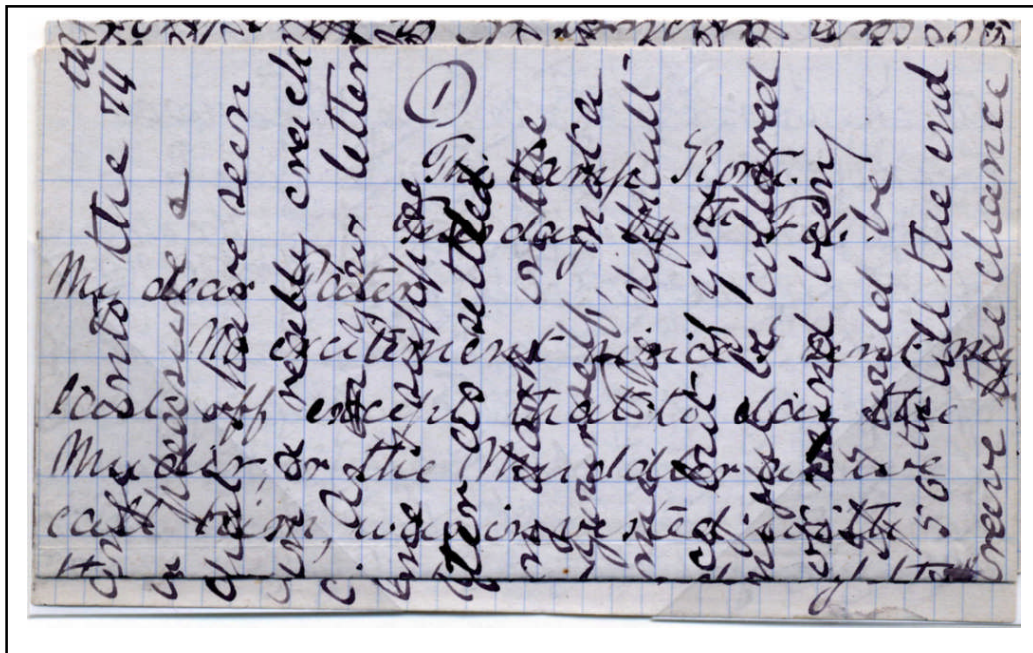
KORTI, SUDAN to ENGLAND

2 MR 85

The one piastre stamp is cancelled with the Korti star and crescent c.d.s. According to Smith perhaps fifteen or so covers exist with this cancellation. It is backstamped **WOOLWICH B MR 24 85**.



The double-written letter describes the Camp at Korti





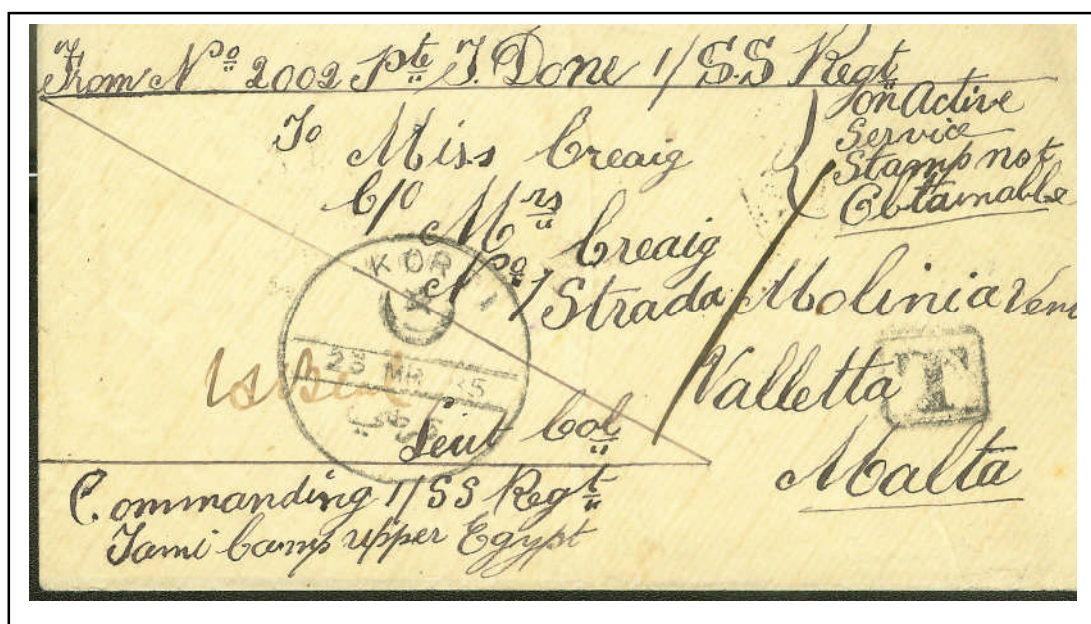
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### One Penny Stampless Concession Rate

TANI, SUDAN via KORTI to.MALTA

23 MR 85

On March 5 1885, Tani was selected as one of the sites for the summer encampment of troops and by the end of the month Korti was evacuated. There was weekly mail collection from Tani with those up to March 23 postmarked at Korti. This cover is postmarked at Korti on the last day of the weekly mails from Tani. The cover from Private Done of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment is endorsed in the lower left by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Beal, regimental commanding officer. The cover bears the T postage due marking and a manuscript 1d. It is backstamped **CAIRE [?] AV 85 ARRIVÉE** and **MALTA A AP 16 85..**



Henry Beal was commissioned an ensign in the South Staffordshire Regiment on 8 June 1860, making colonel 24 years later on 9 July 1884. He served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Regiment in the Egyptian War of 1882, and was present in the reconnaissance in force from Alexandria on 5 August. He received the Egyptian Medal and Khedive's Star. He was with the Nile Expedition in 1884-85, taking part in the operations of the River Column under Major General Earle, and was present at the action at Kirkbeka, where he commanded the Battalion after Colonel Eyre had been shot. He was twice mentioned in dispatches, awarded the Companion of the Order of the Bath and two Clasps to the Egyptian Medal. He also served with the Sudan Frontier Force in 1885-86 during the operations on the Upper Nile.

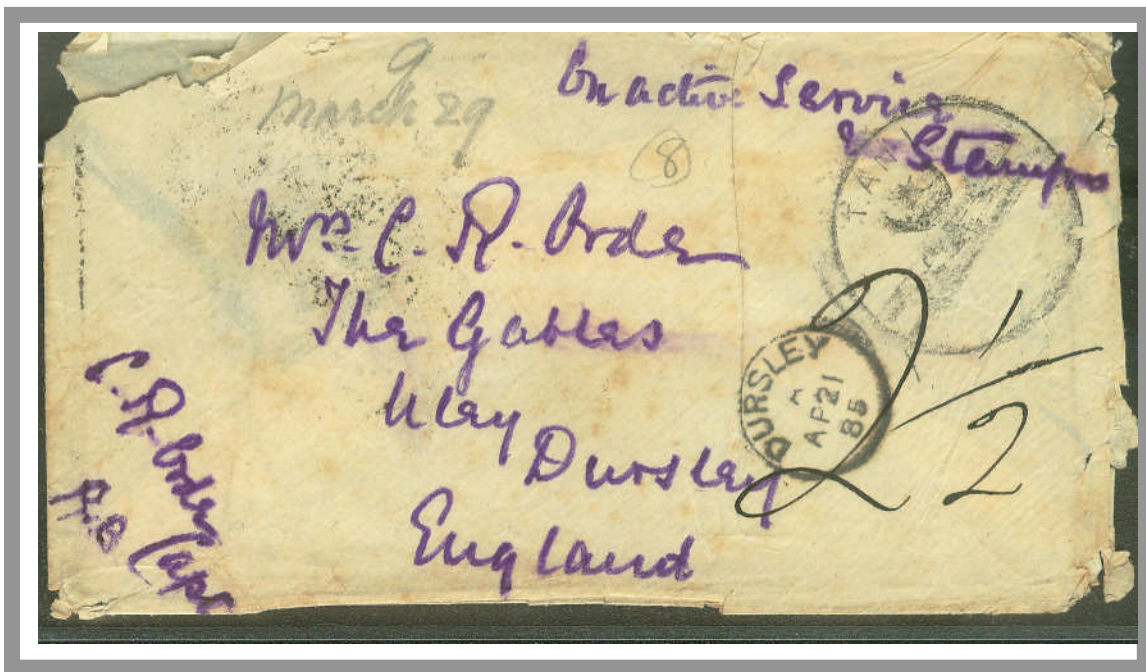
## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### Stampless Officer's Letter

TANI, SUDAN to ENGLAND

29 MR 85

The last March mail from Tani on the 29<sup>th</sup> was postmarked with the Tani date stamp and is the only date that this postmark was used. Subsequent mail was processed at Dongola. This tatty cover is one of only three recorded.<sup>7</sup> There is a manuscript 2½ for the postage to be collected but no T marking. On the reverse are the transit marks of **ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 14 IV 85 T.1** and **GLOUCESTER STATION A AP 21 85**.



Captain Charles Reginald Orde, Rifle Brigade, was directly responsible for the management of the river transport. In the letter enclosed in this cover he tells his wife about the shortage of food, ragged clothing, and the hot temperature (116° in the shade). He also says, "We are now to get papers served out to us like bread. So many papers to each Batn. No private ones allowed. This is done in order to turn the camels on to carry parcels which are much wanted."

<sup>7</sup> See H. L. Bowyer, "Postmarks of the 1884-85 Nile Expedition - The Orde Correspondence," *Camel Post*, Number 33, Spring 1986, pages 7-10. A third cover



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

Captain Orde enclosed the Gordon banknote in his letter to his wife stating:

I send you by this the only curiosity I have picked up. It is a note of Gordon's, value I believe 10 piastres<sup>8</sup> or about 2/-. The signature is Gordon's own and as a relic is probably worth something.

Gordon issued banknotes during the siege of Khartoum. Each bears his signature and says:

### OFFICIAL FIVE PIASTRES

This sum of money is acceptable; we would pay it from the Treasury of Khartoum or Egypt six months from the following date: April 25<sup>th</sup> 1884.

Gordon, Pasha<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Actually it is a five piaster note.

<sup>9</sup> Translation provided by American Philatelic Society Translation Service.

GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

Letter from Captain Charles Reginald Orde, R.E., to his Wife

TANI.

March 29<sup>th</sup> -

My dear Alice

I have now got to my

summer quarter which doesn't seem  
a bad place. The camp is of course  
just above the river and is built  
on coarse yellow sand which doesn't  
fly about like the dust at KORTI  
and elsewhere. There are a few  
small houses. There are but no trees  
and of course lots of rocks all round.  
I expect if any fun is to be had  
with the niggers we shall get it  
here as we are at the junction  
of 2 main roads from KHARTOUM



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### Letter from Captain Charles Reginald Orde, R.E., to his Wife

Tani  
March 29<sup>th</sup> [1885]

My dear Alice

I have now got to my summer quarter which doesn't seem a bad place. The camp is of course just above the river and is luckily on coarse yellow sand which doesn't fly about like the dust at KORTI and elsewhere. There are a few [?] mimosa shrubs but no trees and of course lots of rocks all around. I expect if any fun is to be had with the niggers we shall get it here as we are at the junction of 2 main roads from KHARTOUM.

I am here to look after the boats here 140 in number which will not give me much to do as I simply to see that the different regiments obey my orders. I expect we shall be rather badly off for grub in a short time as we have no sugar, salt, soap, or coffee now & until the river rises again I don't fancy we can get anything in the way of stores. Transport between Abu Fatmeh & Halfa is very shaky as camels are not procurable.

I send you by this the only curiosity I have picked up. It is a note of Gordon's, value I believe 10 piastres<sup>10</sup> or about 2/-. The signature is Gordon's own and as a relic is probably worth something. The weather is getting a bit hot now & I expect will be very bad in the summer. The thermometer has been twice above 116° in the shade during the week in spite of a good breeze blowing all day. The Nile has got very low now and has only about another foot to fall.

I ran across another man you know who is now here doing duty with the 56<sup>th</sup> Archdale of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. He seems very well & asked after you. Sherston is here convalescent. He has been down with fever but is now getting all right & and will move on to Kurot in a few days I expect. Verner is also here on the Intelligence Department & as far as I can make out is likely to make a name for himself. He certainly works hard.

Every steamer has got stuck now except the yarrow boat & 1 steam XXX but they cannot get much above this place. The yarrow boat is an awful thing to look at but a corn plaster success as regards work. We are now to get papers served out to us like bread. So many papers to each Batn. No private ones allowed. This is done in order to turn the camels on to carry parcels which area much wanted.

Every one is in rags more or less. I have to start to & mend my clothes nearly every day. Everything in this country rots very quickly if it gets wet & as I have had all my things perpetually soaked in the boats they are as rotten as possible. I shall be clothed in sack cloth before long which will be rather hot I'm afraid. I expect when I have got all my returns once made out I shall have a lot of time on my hands & not much occupation is to be got here. We go out at daylight & get back into the tents about 8.30 for breakfast (the thermometer is by that time over 100° in the shade) and remain under cover to about 4.30 when we go out again. The evenings are lovely and we feed of course in the open air. Nothing can be got here in the way of food but milk & a few dates which we always make into a sort of jam but as we have no sugar it is not quite jam.

The mail this morning has not come in and I am afraid we shall have to send off the letters without waiting for it which is rather a bore. I have got my foot nearly right now tho' I can't put a boot on but I hope to in a few days. Now I am as fit as possible in all other respects & getting about the colour of mahogany. Many people here think we shall go down the river to Cairo before long but I tell them if they want to go to Cairo they will have t walk as I expect the river is almost if not quite impassable for whalers between Abu Fatmeh & Halfa & there are no camels. Below Halfa whalers could go if they had them, ~~but~~ & there is one small yarrow boat but that won't do much towards moving 8,000 men. It is most difficult even to get the sick down the river the transport is so bad. The flies are pretty bad here but I believe we get no mosquitoes which is a comfort. Mail just off. Goodbye

s/ C. R. Orde

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<sup>10</sup> Actually it is a five piaster note.

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### One Piastre Officer's Letter

DONGALA, SUDAN to SEVENOAKS, KENT, ENGLAND

1 AV 85

The postage on this letter is paid with a block of four of the ten paras, 1882 issue, a rare franking according to Smith.<sup>11</sup> The Dongola postmark had a fairly short life being used between late December 1884 and May/June 1885. The cover is backstamped with the **SEVENOAKS D AP 20 85** squared circle date stamp.



J. Burn-Murdoch was promoted to captain on 18 January 1885. It seems unlikely that he hadn't heard of the promotion by the time this letter was written. Perhaps he just forgot his recently acquired status? The enclosed letter written to his mother on March 29<sup>th</sup>, says in part:

*"I am writing this in a very incompatible berth on the zarrow boat. You will see that I have got as far as this on my way to Abu-Fatmah. I have now quite got rid of the fever & the only thing now is to recover my strength, which I am rapidly doing. . . .The Naval Brigade & Guards Camel Corps are here for the summer... ."*

<sup>11</sup> See Smith, page 861..



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

20 Paras Foreign Post Card Rate

WADI HALFA, SUDAN to ENGLAND

13 AV 85

1879 Egyptian post card for 20 paras paying the foreign rate from a military chaplain. Mail from members of the Expedition through the Wadi Halfa post office is known from at least 22 December 1884 to July 6, 1885.



The reverse of the card reads:

Wady Halfa, Nubia  
April 8<sup>th</sup> 85

Dear Sir:

Just a line to thank you for the three parcels of papers etc. received for distribution amongst the soldiers. — I acknowledged the receipt of the Methodist Records but don't know if you receive that paper. All bright religious literature I shall be most thankful for as it is probable that we shall be here most of the summer.

Yours heartily,  
Thos. D. Barnes, Chaplain

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

Unpaid Officer's Letter — Stamps Not Available On Active Service Soudan

DONGOLA, SUDAN to OXFORD, ENGLAND

15 AV 85

Stampless cover with the relatively short-lived small star and crescent datestamp of Dongola. The boxed T was correctly applied and the 2½-charge mark applied in England where the postage due was collected. The cover is backstamped **OXFORD T MY 5 85**.



The cover is believed to have been sent to the wife of Ernest Pyne of the Royal Marine Light Infantry (perhaps by some family member or a fellow officer). Pyne was commissioned a first lieutenant on December 6, 1867, and promoted to Captain July 1, 1881. He served in the Ashanti War of 1873-1874 (Medal). He also served in the eastern Soudan campaign of 1885, and was present at the engagements at Hasheen and the Torfek zeriba, at that near Tofrek-on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, and at the destruction of Temai. He received the Egyptian Medal with two clasps and the Khedive's Star.



# GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

## Stampless Officer's Letter

TANI, SUDAN to ENGLAND via DONGOLA

5 MA 85



The letter enclosed in this cover is dated 2 May 1885 from Tani. Sent to England, it was redirected to Switzerland and two 2½d stamps applied for the forwarding postage. After Korti was evacuated mail from Tani was sent to Dongola for processing where it was postmarked 5 MA 83 (the last date slug should be 5). Backstamps include **ALEXANDRIE 10 MY 85**, **ULEY C MY 24 85** and **LOCARNO AMBULANT 28 v 85** [?].

Charles Reginald Orde of the Rifle Brigade served with the Nile Expedition in 1884-85. He was mentioned in despatches, received a brevet of Major the Egyptian Medal with Clasp, and the Khedive's Star. He was awarded the Silver Medal of the Royal Humane Society "... for having, on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 1880, assisted to save Lieut. J. H. Campbell of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Highlanders, who had been capsized from a yawl in Gibraltar Bay, the night being pitch dark and the weather squally, accompanied by lightening and thunder."

GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

Letter from Captain Charles Reginald Orde, R.E., to his Wife

TANI.

May 8<sup>th</sup>. 1885.

My dear Alice

We are all in a fever of excitement here with the idea of going down the river. We do not know exactly where we are to move but it will be very soon we expect. I was told to get all the boats ready on Wednesday and telegrams have been flying about like autumn leaves. I shall be very glad to move as there will then be something to do and this sedentary camp life does one no good. The health of the camp is better than at other places but the men are dying off rather



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

### Letter from Captain Charles Reginald Orde, R.E., to his Wife

Tani  
May 2<sup>nd</sup>. 1885

My dear Alice

We are all in a fever of excitement here with the idea of going down the river. We don't know exactly when we are to move but it will be very soon we expect. I was told to get all the boats ready on Wednesday and telegrams have been flying about like autumn leaves. I shall be very glad to move as there will then be something to do and this sedentary camp lives does one no good. The health of the camp is better than at other places but the men are dying off rather too quickly to give much assurance of keeping well. 3 officers have died already and there is one in hospital who is not expected to recover. Most of the cases have been enteric fever. As soon as I know when we are going to move I shall have something to do which will be a comfort. At present there is not much tho' more than there was as we have begun repairing boats but that keeps me loafing in the sun which is not good or pleasant. I got touched up a little 2 days ago and I am not quite right yet tho' I can go about still and hope to be fit again in a day or two. When once the move begins I expect I shall be sent home as they will want to get rid of all the superfluous staff officers as soon as possible and there is really nothing to do after we get down to Abu Fatmeh where we shall have to leave the boats.

Last Sunday I went down the river in a steam launch for a change which was rather amusing. We got aground twice and all had to get out & collect all the niggers we could find before we could get the ship afloat again. We were away for about 10 hours which was something as it is much cooler of course on the river than it is ashore. We have had no South or South Westerly winds yet which is a real blessing but we had a tremendous blow from the North East on Thursday which rather knocked the shanty about tho' it did us no real harm. Two straw huts were cleaned out in camp leaving nothing but the posts to which the mats were fastened.

Of course in a place like this the rumours are endless the present one is that there is to be a gazette in a few days and that brevets are going to be slapped out on all sides. I don't suppose they will give me one tho' it would be a most excellent thing for me if they did now ever that will be all settled probably before you get this letter. Of course you will know what the movements are likely to be long before we do out here. I fancy if we move down soon I shall be home sometime in July. There was a talk in camp last night that this coming move was only to concentrate the forces at Dongola. Every body said they wanted to concentrate at Portsmouth in which I agreed. Dongola is not a place to spend a summer in tho' it never rains there. I would much rather stop here than move down there unless we move right down.

I only got a circular by last mail to ask if I would buy a bust of Gordon and a pamphlet about the Riflemen's Relief Fund, no letters. I always subscribe at the Depot thro' the mess but now they have done away with that and each person gives an annual subscription or a donation. I have not the means of sending anything from here, but if you think you think you can afford it I would like to subscribe the usual thing which is £1 as far as I could see. If you think you can manage it you can send it either to Col. Bunbury or Col. Montgomery who are both on the committee. There was another concert I went to on Thursday but it was very moderate. As usual the men were XX? At and applauded the most extra ordinary things which did not amuse the officers in the least. It was not worth going to in reality but anything in the way of music is something to sit and listen to. One usually sits and listens to frogs, camels & a distant tom tom from the opposite villages.

I have managed to get quite free from sores on my ankles but have got a fresh assortment on my hands. The prick of a thorn is quite enough to bring one on and a scratch never misses. They are an awful bore as they are very painful but there is no getting rid of them without getting good food and a change as they come from poverty of blood. Archdale is rather worse I am sorry to say and can't pull himself together at all. Verner is also down with fever and tho' not very bad is weak and unable to pull round or do anything. I fancy this climate is beginning to weaken everyone and the food is not good enough to help one out of a sick room. I hear Major Boyle of the 60<sup>th</sup> who was Brigade Major to the River Column is desperately ill at JUROT with internal hemorrhages and the doctors say he

cannot live. I am extremely sorry as he is an awfully good chap and a thorough good soldier. Old Gladstone has an awful number of lives to answer for in this business. It is no use wishing he would die, the mischief is done. I think almost everyone is beginning to lose heart over this summer going on the Nile, especially now that the officers are getting sick and dying in this way. I hope you have got the money all right. I am not surprised you were hard up as my pay was something tho' not much.

When we were baling out the boats on Wednesday getting them ready a young crocodile was found in a boat. He was a rea croc. About 18 inches long and snapped viciously at everything that came near him. I should have liked to get him myself but he was found by the Essex men who would not part with him. The Essex are a regiment of savages and undisciplined beyond belief but they always find the best things. They found and got one of the largest crocodiles I have seen and then caught a turtle and have taken all the goose eggs in the country to eat, which has annoyed several people as there are two or three people who collect eggs in the camp.

I suppose by this time you have left the gables for some shanty of your own which will I daresay be much pleasanter. I am sure they always struck me as dull in the extremes. How are mother and the two girls getting on? I suppose they will be home when you get this and thinking of moving the Orde house. Do you ever hear of Edwin? I should like to know what young sportsman is doing. Tell me all the news you can as anything to read about or think about is a Godsend here. The mail from Cairo is late again and so we have to close the home mail before the other comes in. How are you getting on yourself in the Cold tho' I suppose it is getting warm again now? You would not like this heat as it would be too much of a good thing but it is a pity we couldn't divide the heat with England. I hear Lawrie went sick and when he got well would not leave the hospital but [X?] and stick to his hospital comforts until they had to absolutely turn him out. I shall be extremely pleased if I can escape the hospital. One goes on with a sort of dread of getting in. Now good bye for a week. Please remember me to all friends.

Yours very sincerely,

*s/ C. Reginald. Orde*

*P.S. A nigger has just brought me a live sandgrouse which has a broken wing. He is quite tame and is now running about the floor and round my feet. I shall try and keep him.*



## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN

20 Paras Domestic Post Card Rate

DONGALA, SUDAN to CAIRO

13 MA 85

1879 Egyptian post card for 20 paras paying the domestic rate. This is the latest recorded cover of the Nile River Expedition from Dongola. The earliest date known is December 25, 1884.<sup>1</sup>



The reverse of the card has the following message:

Dear Mr. Bencini:

I have written to England by to-days mail for a Glengarry Cap<sup>2</sup> which I have taken the liberty to be addressed c/o Messrs. Bulten & Co. I wish that you would keep it for me if not too much trouble & oblige. Yours faithfully,

R. Sharp

Richard Grainger Atkinson Sharp of the Royal Sussex Regiment was commissioned a Second Lieutenant on 19 February 1881 and a First Lieutenant on 1 July 1881. He served in the Egyptian War of 1882 receiving the Egyptian Medal and Khedive's Star. He also received a Clasp for service with the First Battalion during the 1884-1885 Nile Expedition.

<sup>1</sup> See Firebrace, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> A woolen cap that is creased lengthwise and often has short ribbons at the back. It is named after a valley in central Scotland.

## GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION NILE RIVER COLUMN

Unpaid Officer's Letter — Endorsed: C.B. Active Service No Stamps Available 20.5.85

WADI-HALFA, SUDAN to LONDON

20 MA 85

The cover, correctly charged 2½ d on receipt, is backstamped **ALEXANDRIA I.VI.85** and **LONDON JU 9 85**.



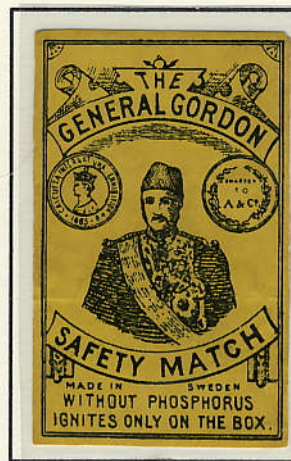
This cover is from Major The Honorable Charles Cavendish George Byng, commanding detachment of the First Life Guards, Household Cavalry.<sup>1</sup> Byng, the fourth son of the second Earl of Strafford, was commissioned a Second Lieutenant by purchase on 8 June 1867 and First Lieutenant by purchase on 30 September 1868. He was promoted to Captain on 9 August 1873, Major on 1 July 1881, and Brevet Lieutenant Colonel on June 15, 1885. He served in the Nile Expedition 1884-85 with the Heavy Camel Regiment, and was present at the engagements at Abu Klea, El Gubat, and Metammeh, and at the attack on the convoy on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 1885 (mentioned in dispatches, Egyptian Medal with two clasps).

<sup>1</sup> See Firebrace, p. 123 for similar cover.



## CONTEMPORARY GENERAL GORDON MATCH LABELS

Safety matches manufactured in Sweden.



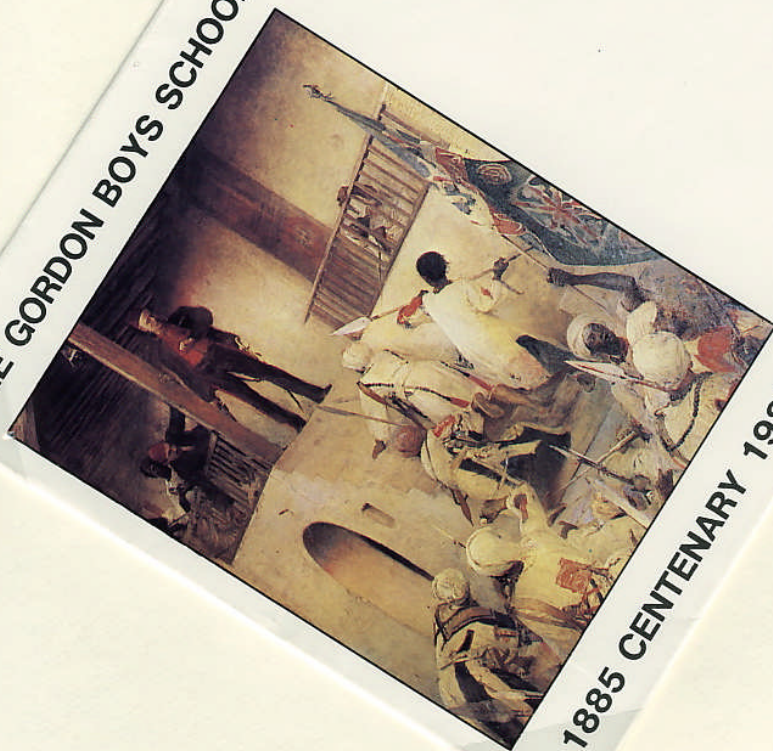
# NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON

PHILATELIC COVER ISSUED TO COMMEMORATE THE  
CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF GORDON



Philatelic Officer  
PO Box 88  
Imperial Barracks  
Leamington  
CV31 1PX

THE GORDON BOYS SCHOOL



1885 CENTENARY 1985



## **NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON**

### **THE GORDON'S BOYS SCHOOL**

#### **THE GORDON BOYS' SCHOOL**

##### **A NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON**

Charles George Gordon was born at Woolwich on 28th January, 1833. He had a unique and outstanding military career.

He was commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1852 and saw early active service in the Crimea at the siege of Sevastopol some three years later.

In 1860 war had broken out in China and Gordon was ordered there, and when a rebellion against the Chinese government broke out Gordon, then a major, was given command of the government troops. He re-organized the army and by his resolution and personal courage inspired his troops and subdued the revolt.

In 1874 Gordon accepted service under the Khedive with instructions to check the slave trade in Sudan, but was only partially successful owing to lack of support and returned to England in 1876. He was eventually persuaded by Ismail Pasha to return as Governor General and spent three years reforming the local system of administration.

After Gordon left the Sudan, there was a series of revolts and when the situation became critical, he was recalled to advise on the best method of carrying out a British withdrawal. The rebels under Mahomed Ahmed, the Mahdi, were already advancing on Khartoum and finally laid siege in March 1884. Gordon held out for nearly a year awaiting reinforcements that never arrived. Finally he was killed at his post on 26th January 1885.

His death at Khartoum so shocked the nation that there was an immediate call for a national memorial to be established. The concept was a home on the lines of that founded by General Gordon at Gravesend in his early days for deprived boys, and this resulted in the inauguration of The Gordon Boys' Home in 1885. From that beginning has evolved The Gordon Boys' School of today which, organized on normal Public School lines, provides boarding education for some 250 boys. It retains its semi military tradition and the majority of the boys come from service families.

The proceeds from the sale of these covers will be devoted to the School Centenary Appeal Fund.



## The Gordon School

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The Gordon School was founded as the Gordon Boys' Home in 1885, financed by public subscription. The school was intended to be a national memorial to General Gordon, killed at Khartoum in January 1885. Gordon had undertaken charitable work among poor boys in Gravesend, Kent and the Gordon Boys' Home continued that work on a larger scale.

According to an 1893 account, the Home took in boys between the ages of 14 and 16, 'such lads, in fact, as Gordon welcomed into his Gravesend lodgings, coming direct from the town street where they have been running wild nearly all their life with little restraint beyond the fear of the police. The Home so trains them, and encourages their better natures, that of those it has started in the world as many as nine out of ten bear characters reported as *good* and *very good*.'

This contemporary illustration shows a 'candidate' for the Gordon Boys' Home upon entry as a poverty stricken waif, contrasting his healthy glow and fine military bearing following four months' training. Entrants lived in an atmosphere of 'airiness, cleanliness and orderliness' in barrack-like accommodation. The glengarry cap, dark blue tunic and Gordon tartan trews which are nowadays reserved for ceremonial use were then the everyday uniform of the boys and there was a good deal of military discipline leavened with muscular Christianity.



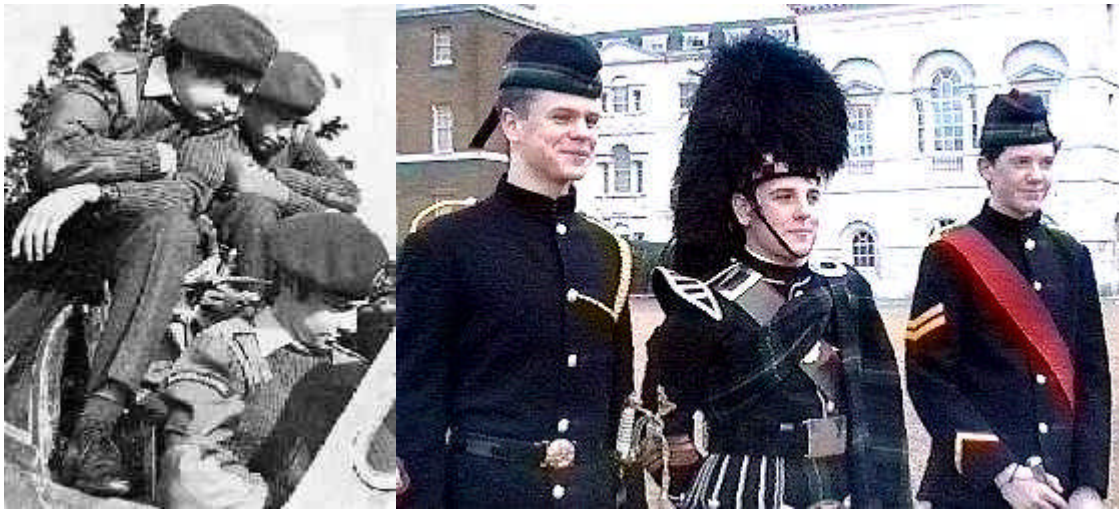


The Gordon Boys' Home was later renamed the Gordon Boys' School and as it expanded the institution began to accept a wider range of boys. However, the school continued to emphasise its 'traditions and humanely disciplined atmosphere, based on the Christian ethic' (*from a 1970s prospectus*).

The four Houses in the school are named after places connected with General Gordon's career. The junior House is Woolwich (where Gordon was born) and the other houses are China, Gravesend and Khartoum.



Gordon School boys are seen lined up for inspection by a House Corporal in this 1959 photograph. At that time 'day uniform' consisted of dark blue corduroy shorts, a navy blouson-style jacket worn with a shirt and tie, and the glengarry cap. The 1959 'Illustrated London News' report which included this picture records that the school had been run on military lines since its foundation and that the boys were 'extremely proud' of their military uniforms.



*Gordon School cadets (left) and senior pupils in their traditional uniforms*

Day uniform at the Gordon School is nowadays the standard British school blazer. Pupils wear military uniform for Combined Cadet Force activities and dress in the traditional Victorian uniform for special occasions. The school is now fully co-educational and occupies fine premises near Woking, in Surrey.

Nowadays Victorian hero figures such as General Gordon are noted to have possessed faults as well as virtues and the statue of the hero of Khartoum stands somewhat neglected upon the Thames Embankment in London. However, once a year a contingent of smartly-uniformed pupils from the school that bears his name marches to Gordon's statue to lay wreaths and remember his many achievements and gallant end.





*The school's memorial to Gordon, which originally stood in Khartoum*

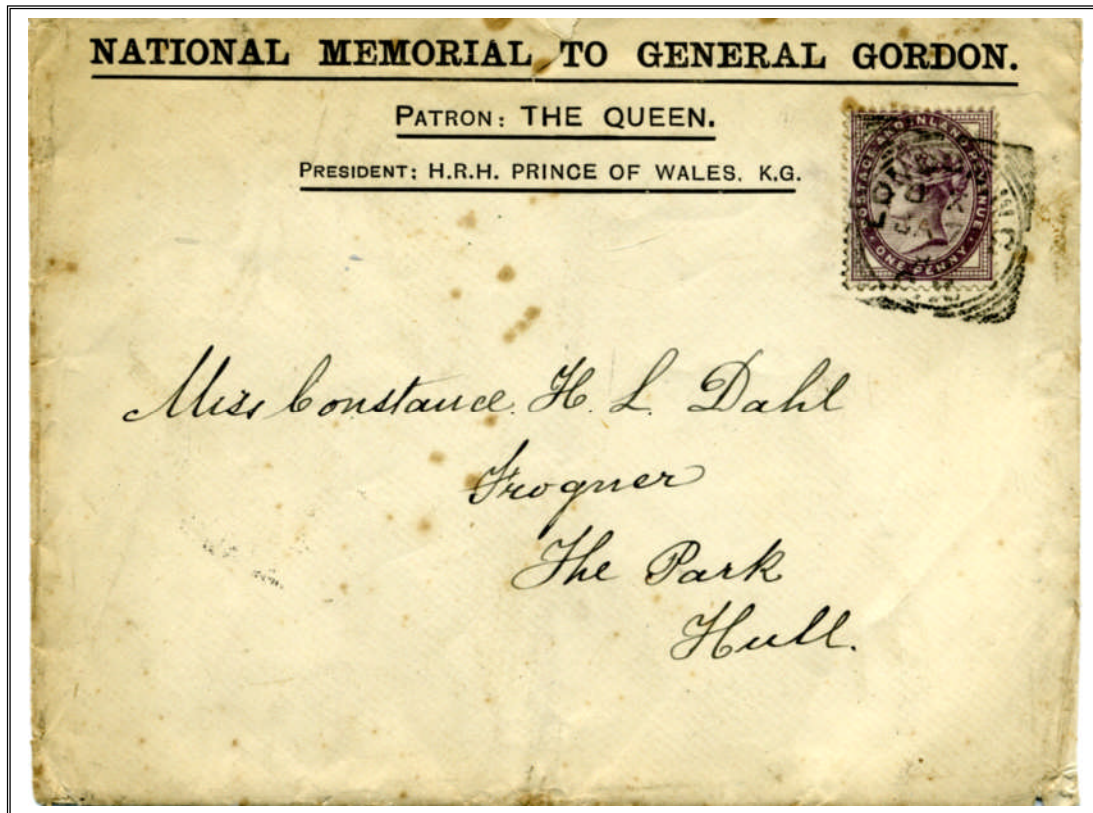
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## NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON

LONDON W.C. to HULL

JA 7 89

The cover is backstamped *HULL A JA 8 89 N.W.*



The Gordon School was founded as the Gordon Boys' Home in 1885, financed by public subscription at the express wish of Queen Victoria, as the National Memorial to General Gordon. Since its foundation the school has been privileged to have the reigning Monarch as its Patron. Gordon had undertaken charitable work among poor boys in Gravesend, Kent and the Gordon Boys' Home continued that work on a larger scale.

According to an 1893 account, the Home took in boys between the ages of 14 and 16, 'such lads, in fact, as Gordon welcomed into his Gravesend lodgings, coming direct from the town street where they have been running wild nearly all their life with little restraint beyond the fear of the police. The Home so trains them, and encourages their better natures, that of those it has started in the world as many as nine out of ten bear characters reported as *good* and *very good*.'



# NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON

Letter acknowledging donation to Gordon Boys' Home.

GORDON BOYS HOME,  
CHOBHAM, WOKING,  
TELEGRAPH OFFICE, CHOBHAM, 2 MILES.

L & S.W.RY STATIONS.

## DISTANCES.

Brookwood  $5\frac{1}{2}$  Miles.  
Woking 5 "  
Bagshot 2 $\frac{3}{4}$  "  
Sunningdale 4 by Common.  
5 " Road.

*London Offices.*

*20 Cockspur Street, S.W.*

*7<sup>th</sup> January 1859*

*Dear Miss Constance*

*I am so much obliged  
to you and your little brother Jacky  
for having again helped us, and I  
thank you very much for the kind  
letter which accompanied the Postal  
Orders for thirty shillings, these all  
reached me this morning -*

*I should indeed have much  
liked to see your plan of the Battle  
of Waterloo which must have been  
most successfully designed, & added  
by the exhibition of it, so large an  
addition to our funds -; but I am*

**NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON**

Receipt acknowledging donation to Gordon Boys' Home.

All Donations will be acknowledged in the "TIMES" on the first Monday  
of the following quarter.

**The "Gordon" Boys' Home.**  
Office—20, COCKSPUR STREET, S.W.

No. **2032**

Received this 7<sup>th</sup> day of January 1889  
of Miss Constance H. S. Master J. Dahl  
the sum of Thirty shillings, proceeds of an exhibition

£ 1 : 10 : 0 G. A. Maty-Parrell Secy  
Secretary.

## NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON

7<sup>th</sup> January 1889

Dear Miss Constance

*I am so much obliged to you and your little brother Jacky for havinh again helped us, and thank you very much for the kind letter which accompanied the Postal Orders for thirty shillings. These all reached me this morning.*

*I should indeed have much liked to see your plan of the Battle of Waterloo which must have been most successfully designed, ... [?] so large an addition to our friends, but I am indeed very sorry to hear you are not strong. I hope the exertions over the preparation of your exhibition has not made you worse.*

*Please accept my hearty good wishes for your recovery to health & strength.*

*I shall always be glad to hear from you. Once more my best thanks to jacky and yourself.*

*With every good wish to you and yours for 1889.*

*Believe me dear Miss Constance your sincere friend,*

*G. A. Beaty-Pownall, Lt. Col*

*P.S. If you look in the advertisements in this day's Times you will find your contribution of two pounds which you sent me last November amongst a large list.*

Lieutenant Colonel George Albert Beaty-Pownall, Royal Artillery, was commissioned Lieutenant on 18 December 1861, Captain, 10 February 1875, Major, 18 December 1881, and Lieutenant Colonel, 17 May 1882.

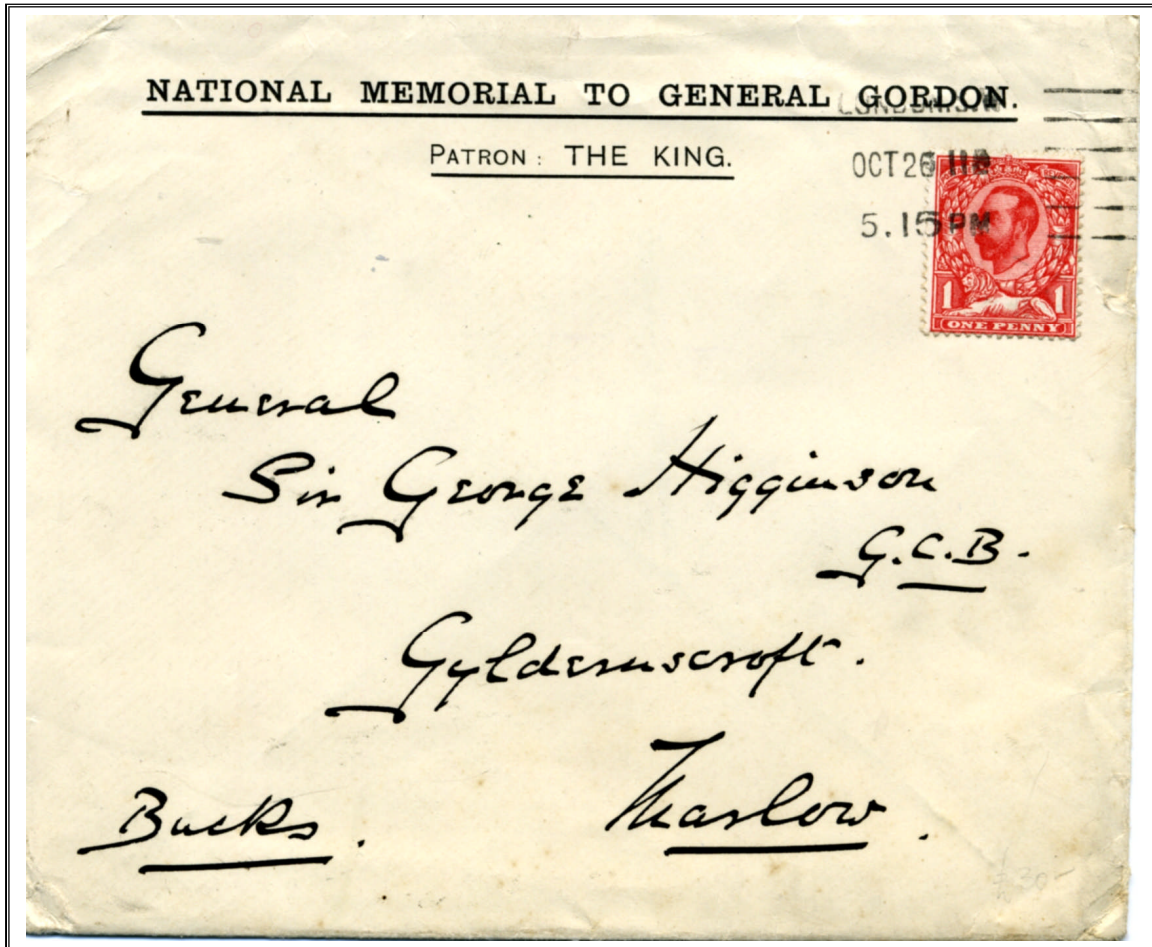


## NATIONAL MEMORIAL TO GENERAL GORDON

LONDON to HARLOW

OCT 26 11

The cover is backstamped **HARLOW OC 27 11**



Sir George Wentworth Alexander Higginson, G.C.B., Colonel of the Worcestershire Regiment, was commissioned a Lieutenant on 14 February 1845, and rose through the ranks to General on 11 October 1890. He served throughout the Eastern campaign of 1854-55, as Adjutant 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards, including the battles of Alma, Balaklava, and Inkerman (horse killed), siege and fall of Sebastopol; after which he served as Brigade Major of the Guards until the conclusion of the war (Medal with four clasps, Brevets of Major and Lt. Colonel, Knight of the Legion of Honor, 5<sup>th</sup> Class of the Medjidie, CB, and Turkish Medal).